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MEN THAT COUNT

BY

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RICHARD R. SMITH, INC.
NEW YORK
1929

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES

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MEN THAT COUNT

I

NEEDLESS POVERTY—JAMES

James 4: 3

"You have not, because you do not pray." (Weymouth)

The author of this text is no idle dreamer. He is no spinner of vague and worthless theories. He is in a peculiar sense the practical man among a group of men not one of whom was a visionary. He writes with his feet firmly fixed on the ground. He emphasizes the gospel of works. Nothing counts with him that does not get results. We may listen, therefore, with great confidence to what he has to say about the big, and often perplexing, matter of prayer. Our confidence ought to be increased yet more by the fact that he has tested through a long period of years something of what can be accomplished through prayer. In fact, he has won the name of "Camel-knees" by his persistent practice of prayer. He has, therefore, a right to speak and it is only reasonable that we should give him our careful attention.

What has he found? Does prayer really help, or does it not? Is it a genuine force, or is it a sheer futility? This sane and common-sense apostle gives no uncertain

answer to this question. He is absolutely sure of the efficacy of prayer. No scientist coming from his laboratory could be more certain of his findings than is James as he comes from his place of prayer. And no scientist, I make bold to say, can speak with greater authority. For discoveries in the realm of the spiritual are just as valid as discoveries in the realm of the material. What then does he have to say? Armed with a knowledge born of experience, he looks with frank amazement upon our emptiness and spiritual poverty and declares with conviction, "You have not, because you do not pray. Your poverty would be changed into plenty, your want into wealth, your pitiful inadequacy into glorious adequacy if you would only pray."

I

Now whether we do or do not agree with James as to the value of prayer as a remedy for our ills, we must agree that those ills exist. There is a sense of lack, of spiritual poverty, among us to which we cannot shut our eyes. We have never before had such splendid material equipment for the doing of the work of the Kingdom as we have today. We have the best of church buildings, the most modern of educational plants. We have never had so many well-trained ministers in our pulpits, nor so many cultured teachers in our Sunday Schools. Yet, there still seems to be something wanting. In spite of all our marvelous improvements, there remains a lack of inner satisfaction and of outward conquest. Too many are yet fretful and feverish, powerless and ineffective. Too many are asking with the Rich Young Ruler,

"What lack I yet?" or with the Psalmist, "Who will show us any good?"

And this sense of want is by no means confined to those outside the Church. Often it is even more pronounced among those within the Church. There are multitudes of professing Christians who are sadly disappointed in their religious lives. A woman said to me some time ago, "I used to say before I entered the Church, 'If ever I become a Christian, I am going to be the right kind of Christian.'" Then she added, "But I am about like the rest. It has not really made much difference." She was not bitter, she was not antagonistic, she was not even indifferent of cynical. She was simply disappointed. She seemed to be wondering sadly if what she had found was the best that an infinite Christ could do for a human soul.

Along with this widespread lack of inward satisfaction there is in consequence an equally widespread sense of inadequacy as we face the pressing spiritual needs about us. Many of us know all too well how to sympathize with that empty-handed and embarrassed host of whom the Master tells. Guests have come our way and we have nothing to set before them. Some of these are very dear to us. Some are our own loved ones. Some are our dearest friends. Some belong to our Sunday School classes. Some are members of our churches. We would gladly help, but too often our sense of emptiness either puts us to silence or makes our words seem little more than an impertinence. Therefore, we stand baffled, with nothing to offer but what we can glean from an empty larder.

Not only does this lack of spiritual adequacy affect us personally, but it has its influence upon those whom we would serve. There are many burdened and battered folks who really long for help. They would come to us, only they are not fully convinced that we have anything of real value to give. Sometimes they do come and go away disappointed. What a tragedy when "the hungry sheep look up and are not fed." What a tragedy it is when boys and girls sit for years in our Sunday School classes and attend our churches, and this in the most impressionable period of their lives, and at last slip through our fingers without any definite knowledge of Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. How tragic when colossal evils swagger before us in bold defiance, because they know that we have no mighty weapon with which to strike them dead. Surely Christ can do more for us than many of us are at present making it possible for Him to do.

II

What is the secret of our lack? What lies back of our spiritual inadequacy?

It is certainly not born of any inadequacy on the part of our Lord. When we turn the pages of our New Testament, we are constantly amazed and thrilled by the fascinating spiritual adequacy of those whom we meet. The characteristic word that is used to describe them is "full." When Peter is introduced he is described as "full of the Holy Spirit." Stephen is a man "full of the Holy Spirit and power." Barnabas is a good man "full of the Holy Spirit and faith." And when John undertakes to

account for the marvelous changes that have been wrought in the lives of all that know Jesus, he declares, "Of His fullness have we all received." Emptiness for these seems a sheer impossibility. As the bay is being filled by the sea, so they are being filled by the Infinite Sea, even Jesus Christ our Lord.

And all these are most emphatic and enthusiastic in declaring that this same gracious opulence is for ourselves. They cannot find words strong enough to express their conviction of the matchless ability of their Lord. "He is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him." "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." "He is able to keep you from falling and present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." "God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abount unto every good work."

Neither is our lack born of any unwillingness on the part of our Lord. There was a leper that came to Him who was in serious doubt as to His willingness to help him. Life had dealt hardly with this leper. He had been rebuffed and repelled so many times that he had ceased to believe in the reality of love. He thought that, so far as he himself was concerned, love was dead. Therefore, he threw his rotting body at the feet of Jesus and said, "Lord if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean. I believe in Thy power, but I am afraid Thou wilt not be willing to exercise it on behalf of one so wretched and worthless as I." But Jesus responded to his half-faith. He touched him and said, "I will; be thou clean."

Now there was some excuse for a lack of faith in the willingness of Jesus on the part of this poor wretch, but there is no excuse on the part of ourselves. These same men who speak so glowingly and confidently of the ability of Christ to meet our needs, speak with no less conviction and enthusiasm of His willingness. To think of Him as grudging, as niggardly, is an utter impossibility. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things."

Why then are we in want? The answer is in the text. "You have not, because you do not pray." Real prayer, James declares, would meet all our needs. Not that our praying is to persuade God to be willing to help us, He is already willing. But prayer does make it possible for God to do for us and through us what He cannot do if we do not pray. This is the testimony of the Word of God. This is the testimony of all the saints. To be convinced of this, all that is necessary is to give prayer a fair and honest trial.

But mark you, James is speaking of real prayer. There is a saying of prayers that is of little worth. According to James there are three requirements for effective praying.

1. To really pray we must be in earnest. It is the earnest, energized prayer that avails much. It is impossible for God to answer the prayer of one who does not really desire an answer. That is the reason why those who are without any trouble or perplexity are seldom mighty in prayer. It is only as the hands of a great need seize our shoulders and crush us to our knees that we

really pray. It is when we cry in desperate earnestness, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me," that we prevail with God.

2. The prayer that prevails is that of a righteous man. That does not mean, of course, that one must be sinless in order to pray. It does mean that he must be right in his motives, that he must be willing to be made right. It is useless for a sinner to ask for the forgiveness of his sins if he expects to commit that same sin again as soon as he rises from his knees. To answer such a prayer would be a curse rather than a blessing. "God woos the sinner in the far country by the swine trough, but he feeds him at home."

Nor can the Christian pray while there is a quarrel between himself and his God. Did you ever try to pray when every time you bowed the knee there came before you a duty that you ought to perform, but that you were unwilling to perform, or a practice that you ought to give up that you did not wish to give up? Prayer under such conditions is an impossibility. The greatest of all poets is here true at once to the Bible and to experience. The king of Denmark has become king through the murder of his brother. He has stolen his brother's crown and his brother's wife. His guilt tortures him. He fain would find rest from the lashings of his outraged conscience. Therefore, he betakes him to his knees, but it is a vain effort.

"But, O! What form of prayer
Can serve my turn? Forgive me my foul murder?—
That cannot be; since I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder,

My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardon'd, and retain th' offense?
In the corrupter currents of this world,
Offense's gilded hand may shove by justice;
And oft 'tis seen, the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law: but 'tis not so above;
There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In his true nature; and we ourselves compell'd
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
To give in evidence. What then? What rests?
Try what repentance can? What can it not?
Yet what can it, when one cannot repent?
O, wretched state! O bosom, black as death!
O, limed soul! that, struggling to be free,
Art more engag'd."

"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God."

3. Prayer to be effective must be offered in faith. Faith is the hand that takes. It is that which opens the door for the incoming of the blessing that we ask from the King. "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord."

III

Now when we pray after this fashion, James tells us, our prayer avails much. It becomes a mighty force.

What are some of the things that both Scripture and experience emphatically declare that it accomplishes?

1. Such praying brings forgiveness of sin. It brings a sense of pardon. It enables us to feel with Mr. Wesley that God has put away our sins, even ours. Here is a man named Jacob. He is inwardly and outwardly crooked. He is a creature of shifts and devices. But in a time of crisis he spent one night in genuine prayer. That one night changed his life. The moral pauper became a spiritual prince. The sunrise that shone upon him as he limped away from that scene of conflict and conquest was not so bright as the Sun of Righteousness that shone ever afterwards in his heart.

2. Prayer brings a consciousness of God. Prayer makes it possible for us to realize our unseen Lord. That is what all those have found who have really prayed. And that, I may say, is the supreme blessing of prayer. Better than any gift that God can give is the gift of Himself. Nothing can daunt us, nothing can quench the fires of our enthusiasm, nothing can destroy our courage, nothing can blast our hopes, if we realize God. "I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved."

3. Prayer makes us effective in the work of the Kingdom. There is power in the personality, the deeds, and the words of a praying man to which the prayerless man is a stranger. A cup of cold water given by his hands often becomes the Water of Life to him who drinks it. A bit of bread given by him becomes the Bread of Life to him who eats it. A word, a handclasp, even a look is often blessed to the salvation of a soul. It is to the man

of prayer that God gives a mouth and wisdom that men cannot gainsay nor resist.

4. Prayer is a means of recruiting for the King. When Jesus looked at the harassed and bedraggled multitude, His heart went out to them. But He saw in them more than creatures of need. He saw in them amazing possibilities. He saw that they were a rich harvest going to waste. I hate to see a harvest left ungathered. Having come from the farm, it always hurts me to go by a wheat field that is ripe for harvesting and find no laborers there. And how much greater the tragedy when the harvest is made up of splendid men and women, of boys and girls, so rich in radiant possibilities.

But how are these to be reached? They can only be reached through laborers, through men and women like ourselves who are willing to spend and be spent in the task. And how are the laborers to be secured? They are to be secured in answer to prayer. "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He will thrust forth laborers into the harvest." Our laborers whether they are ministers or laymen, whether they work in the home field or in the far-away places of the earth, usually come from homes and from churches that are sweetened by the breath of prayer.

5. Then prayer brings the blessing of God upon the laborers that are sent into the field. Paul never wrote a letter, except to the backslidden church of Galatia, without asking for the prayers of those to whom he wrote. He believed that the humblest of the saints could be the means of anointing his lips with grace and power. How many preachers would preach better if they were being

constantly upheld by the prayers of those that sit in the pews. It is my candid conviction that if pastors and people would coöperate in prayer as it is their privilege to do, every church would become a dynamo of spiritual power. Our failures would become successes, and our defeats would be changed into thrilling victories. Then, and only then, everyone with an eye to see would be constrained to say of us, "You have, because you pray."

II

WORRY AND ITS CURE—PAUL

Philippians 4: 6–7

> "In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

EVERY Christian, I suppose, has some particular passage of Scripture that has been found helpful above all others. This is my favorite. I have come to it in times of stress and strain. I have found it a strong staff upon which to lean when my feet were in slippery places. I have found it a comforting pillow on which to rest my head when I was no longer able to stand. How bracing it is! How reassuring! How full of comfort! It is as tender as the caress of a mother. It is stronger than the everlasting hills. "In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known unto God."

"In nothing be anxious." This is a big order. It seems extravagant and too good to be true. What does Paul mean?

Certainly he does not mean to urge upon us a flippant and happy-go-lucky attitude toward life. Paul was a man of deep moral earnestness. With him the business of living was a serious business. Nobody was further than he from making a joke of life. He was no listless dweller in some lotus land. He was a hard campaigner. He was a courageous champion of righteousness. He gave himself to tremendous tasks that involved ceaseless conflict. He took life seriously, and he surely would have you and me to do the same.

No more is Paul warning us against the thought-out life. He is in no sense opposed to our making wise plans for the future. It was he who said, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." He believed it our right and duty to decide in advance as to the harvest we desire. The Bible is never against the planned life. Jesus Himself tells us a story of a man who set out to build a tower. But he was haphazard in his planning. He did not suit his undertaking to his ability. For this reason he was not able to finish. Naturally, that which he actually builded was of no worth. Therefore, all who passed by laughed at his stupidity.

What, then, does Paul mean by this amazing text? He is warning us against the fretful and feverish attitude toward life. He is warning us against listening to the voice of fear instead of to the voice of faith. He is forbidding us to worry. He is against the anxious and fear-filled life. He is eager that we should know the peace of God. And in so speaking he is in harmony with the choicest of the saints in both the Old and the New Testament. How bracingly this note sings through the

Psalms! "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him." "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear." "Cast thy burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain thee." "Fret not thyself; it tends only to evil."

And when we come to the New Testament, this note is even more dominant. Peter writes, "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." Jesus is constantly amazed at how full of fear we are in our Father's world. He reminds us of God's care for the birds. He tells us that never a sparrow falls but that God is there. He tells us how God clothes the lilies; how the very hairs of our heads are numbered; that for this reason we are to take no anxious thought for the morrow. He stretches out loving arms to the harassed and worried multitudes saying, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Certainly the Bible is against worry.

II

Why do we need to be warned against worry?

1. We need this warning because worry is so common. It is so widespread. Worry belongs to no one class. It belongs to every class. Poor folks worry, but so do the rich. Cultured folks worry, but so do the unlettered and unlearned. Old folks worry, but so do the youth in life's green spring. People worry who are in good circumstances, and others worry who are in harsh and trying circumstances. There are some in the Church who worry, and there are some outside the Church who worry.

Worry is the experience of all sorts and conditions of men.

Then we worry about all sorts of things. We worry about how we are going to get money. We worry about how we are going to keep it. We worry about how we are going to spend it. We worry about the things that we have. We worry about things that we do not have. We worry about what we have said, and we worry about what we have failed to say. We worry about what we have done, and we worry about what we have failed to do. We worry about our bodies. We worry about our souls. We worry about our families. Some worry because they are married. Others worry because they are not.

Often we worry over real calamities. More often still, we worry over calamities that never take place. There is no doubt that the vast majority of our worry is about troubles that are purely imaginary. I am told that a stranger visiting Colorado for the first time told his host on the morning after his arrival that he was going to walk over to the mountains before breakfast. Now it so happened that, in spite of the fact that those mountains seemed quite near, they were in reality about fifteen miles away. But the host decided to let his guest discover the distance for himself. So the gentleman set out and walked and walked and walked. But the mountains seemed just as far away as when he began. At last a farmer came upon him as he was sitting on the bank of an irrigation ditch removing his shoes. "What are you going to do?" asked the farmer. "I am going to swim this river," was the reply. "But, man, you can step across

it," was the amazed answer. But the stranger was indignant. He said, "You folks are not going to make a fool out of me any more. I thought it was only a step to the mountain, but I find it is many miles. Therefore, I am going to swim this river." And we worry most about how we are going to cross rivers that really do not exist.

2. We need this warning because worry is so utterly useless. We may do many useless things, but we can never do anything more absolutely useless than to worry. Jesus indicated the utter absurdity of it when He asked, "Which of you by taking thought (or worrying) can add one cubit unto his stature?" If you are not as tall as you wish to be, you will certainly not grow taller by worrying about it. Worry never did the slightest good in any direction. It never lifted a single burden. It never solved a single problem. It never dried a single tear.

It has been well said that there are two classes of things about which nobody ought ever to worry. First, we ought never to worry about the things that we can help. The only wise thing to do is to help them. Did you ever lie in bed and shiver when you did not have quite enough cover, instead of getting up and finding another blanket? If you ever did, you can remember that your worry did not get you warm. This sounds trite, but there were thousands of people that lay awake last night worrying about things that they could have as readily remedied as you could have cured your worry by getting another cover.

Second, we ought never to worry about the things that we cannot help. This does not mean that we are not to

grieve over our real sorrows and our losses. God never expected that we should live tearless lives. But it does mean that we are not to be fretful and feverish and anxious. If you cannot in any way help a situation, then accept it as part of God's plan for your life. You will certainly not help matters by worrying. The sun rises in the east. You may prefer that it rise in the west, but your worry will not change the situation in the slightest.

Frank Boreham, in one of his charming essays, emphasizes the wisdom of shutting the gate, once we have passed through it. Some leave it open and are always slipping back through again. Happy is the man who can shut the gate. If a mistake has been made that you can correct, correct it. But if you cannot correct it, there is but one thing to do and that is to turn your back upon it. We must not allow ourselves to anxiously desire what we cannot have. We must shut the gate on it. If I see a man asleep in my audience, I will wake him if I can. But if I cannot, I will stop looking in his direction and forget about him. If I did not, he would worry me. Never, therefore, worry about the things that you can help or cannot help. It is useless.

3. We need this warning because worry is so hurtful. "Fret not thyself," says the author of the Thirty-seventh Psalm, "it tends only to evil." That is, worry never does anything but harm. I said a moment ago that worry had never solved a single problem nor lifted a single burden nor dried a single tear. But it has been most fruitful in creating problems and in increasing our burdens. It has also produced a most abundant harvest of tears. It is one

of the most common foes of our humanity to-day, and one of the bitterest. This is true for the following reasons:

(1) Worry hurts the one that worries. There are few forms of dissipation that do more damage, physically, mentally, and spiritually, than worry. It takes almost an endless amount of work to kill, but it does not take worry long to turn your face toward the cemetery. On a recent rainy day I lost the hub-cap off one of the front wheels of my car. I discovered immediately that the machine would run just as well without it. But the man who looks after the car for me would not allow me to drive it for an hour without replacing the missing part. He said that I might get some grit and sand in the bearings and cut them to pieces in a few days when otherwise they would last for years. And worry is the grit and sand that surely hasten the wrecking of our human machinery.

(2) Worry hurts others. If we could get off in some lonely spot and worry all by ourselves, it would not be so bad. If there were some pesthouse where we could send folks who are everlastingly worrying, what an incalculable blessing it would be! But there is no way of isolating patients suffering from this deadly disease. Therefore, they infect others. How many homes are in ruins whose ruin was brought about, in part, if not solely, through some nerve-racked husband or wife who was a victim of worry. One who is always worried is as annoying as a toothache and more oppressive than London fog.

(3) Worry is a wound to the heart of God. It makes

one a burden to himself, a burden to others, and a burden to his Lord. What a disappointment when one who claims to be a child of the King is constantly moping and fretting and stewing as if his Father in heaven were either an utter bankrupt or completely heartless. A worrying Christian is a dishonor to God. He is a universal disappointment. Surely we ought to get rid of worry, because it tends only to evil.

III

But how are we to get rid of it? That is the big question.

Well, there are certain definite ways in which we are not likely to get rid of it. We are not going to cure worry by getting into an ideal situation. This is true for the simple reason that there are not many ideal situations in this world. Then if the situation were ideal, it would still not prevent worry. Some of the most worried people in the world have seemingly the least to worry about. Some of the most carefree and joyous people in the world are in circumstances that are fraught with heartache and tragedy.

Nor are you going to cure worry by simply laughing it off. We are not going to cure it by getting drunk and forgetting about it. To take that road is only to tighten its grip. We are not going to find a remedy in a fool's paradise. There are some expressions that we use to encourage each other that nauseate rather than cure. "Well, you don't have to die but once," says some grinning want-wit. "But to die once usually proves fatal,"

we might answer this wise philosopher. No, there is no relief in that direction.

1. In seeking a cure for worry, the first step is to realize that a cure is possible. That there is a remedy is clearly taught in the Bible. It is also taught through the experiences of a countless multitude of saints. "Oh, well," you are ready to say, "it is all right for you preachers to talk like that. But you don't know what I am up against. You don't know my financial situation. You are not acquainted with the grim domestic tragedy that is putting out every star in my sky. You don't know that the doctor has just passed sentence of death upon one I love better than life. If you knew my situation, you would not talk like that."

What you say may be true. There are lives here present that are torn by tragedies of which I know little. There are many darkened rooms into which I have never looked. I have never seen my life fall in ruins about me as some of you have. Yet it is heartening to remember that the author of this text is no freshman in the school of life. He is no raw recruit boasting of battles that he has never fought. He has been intimate with almost every kind of sorrow that meets us on the road of life. He has suffered the loss of all things. He has had to limp through life with a thorn in his flesh. He is in prison as he writes this letter. Soon he is to stand trial before a bloody despot. Yet he has a quiet heart, and out of his eyes looks a great peace. He declares emphatically that there is a cure for worry, and, as he does so, all the real saints say "Amen."

2. A second step toward finding a cure for worry is

to realize that we can in some measure help ourselves. We can cultivate the fine habit of looking for the best instead of for the worst. If there are two windows in our house, one looking out on a pig-sty and the other upon a flower garden, we can at least spend more time looking out of the window that gives us a glimpse of beauty. That is what Paul meant when he said, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsover things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

3. But the supreme remedy is prayer. "In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." "In nothing be anxious." How mad seems such an exhortation in a world like ours. No, it is not madness; it is the height of sanity. It is perfectly reasonable to be anxious about nothing, if in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving we let our requests be made known unto God. Whatever causes anxiety, that we are to make a matter of prayer. We are to take our worries to Him. We are to be definite and specific in bringing our requests before God. We are to present these requests with thanksgiving, and as we thus pray, God pledges Himself to meet our needs.

How will He do it? He will either remove that which causes our worry or He will give us grace to bear it. But whether He delivers us from our fiery furnace or walks with us in the midst of it, He will certainly give us peace. That is His unfailing legacy to him who prays. "My

peace I give unto you." Such had been Paul's experience during his stormy yesterdays. Such is his experience as he writes this letter. A Roman soldier is pacing back and forth before his prison-cell. But there is a guard on duty that is closer and more real than this Roman soldier. That guard is the peace of God. So Paul sings triumphantly, "In nothing be anxious, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known unto God. And the peace of God that passeth all understanding shall garrison your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

III

ALL THINGS NEW—PAUL

II Corinthians 5: 17

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new."

I

The text is a shout. Paul is speaking out of a heart filled with irrepressible gladness. It is hard for him to credit the reality of the winsome wonderland in which he finds himself. Old things have passed away; all things have become new. Dull prose has become songful poetry. Tedious monotony has been changed into enchanting variety. Drab reality has become radiant romance. Every morning he wakes full of a glad expectancy. Every night he closes his eyes with the conviction that to-morrow will be richer in glad surprises even than to-day. All life has become thrillingly new.

Now it strikes me that what Paul has found, all the world, consciously or unconsciously, is seeking. We have an instinctive hatred of monotony. We do not want our lives to be mere treadmill affairs. We want to travel a roadway that winds along by songful streams and be-

side lovely fields and fragrant gardens. We want it to climb into the heights now and then, and to dip down into the cool depths of the canyon. We crave variety. We hunger for thrills. So true is this that we spend endless money, we spend vast ingenuity, we spend our very bodies and souls, oftentimes, in a pathetic effort to be able to say, even for a passing moment, "All things are become new."

But in spite of our frantic and feverish efforts, most of us never succeed. We seem willing to take any trail except the right one. We try achievement, we try pleasure, we try getting and spending. But our efforts are mainly futile. We find ourselves reaching the same conclusion of one who had vast experience with life long ago: "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be . . . and there is no new thing under the sun." "Do what you will," he tells us in utter bitterness, "life is sure to lose its tang. Soon for every one the anchor drags, and the wine of life becomes exhausted. The growing boy may behold the light and whence it flows, but the man is certain to perceive it die away and fade into the light of common day. There is absolutely no way of keeping life from becoming dull and gray, drab and old."

But Paul is of a different mind. How encouraging, therefore, to turn from this depressed and disillusioned preacher to the author of our text. As he speaks his radiant face beams upon us across the far spaces of the years. "I have found life wonderfully fresh and fascinating," he tells us joyfully. "In fact, since I met Jesus Christ I have lived in a new world. Life for me is not

hastening toward a dull anticlimax, but toward an ever-surprising climax. For me old things are passed away; all things are become new. I am constantly being thrilled by the wild joy of living."

Now this man is willing to share his secret with us. Should we not do well, therefore, to sit at his feet for a while? Is it not especially appropriate that we do so on this the last Sunday of the old year? In a few hours we are going to change our calendars. We are going to enter upon what we hopefully call "The New Year." But for many it will not be a new year at all. It will only be another year. It will be just another journey round the treadmill of the seasons; just three hundred and sixty-five other stages, punctuated by yawns, toward nothing in particular. But to those who share Paul's secret it will be a new year indeed, a year of glad usefulness and of thrilling discoveries.

II

"All things have become new." What does Paul mean by this statement?

He does not mean, of course, that God has actually created a new universe before his eyes. The American Revised Version gives the more correct translation. It translates it thus: "Old things have passed away. Behold, they are become new." Paul still lives in the same commonplace world in which he had lived before his conversion. He is still surrounded by men and women who sin, and suffer, despair and hope. He is warmed by the same sun. The same stars glitter in the night

sky. The same flowers bloom. The same birds sing. The same mountains lift their majestic heads toward heaven, and the same seas sob along all shores. Yet Paul, speaking out of his own experience, declares truly, "All things are become new."

Nor does Paul mean simply that all things are changing. Of course that is true. We live in a constant flux of change. We change our styles of dress, as all struggling husbands know. "Yesterday mother looked like an umbrella opened, to-day daughter looks like a parasol closed." We change our styles in art, in literature and architecture. We change our modes of living. Yesterday we lived largely at home. When we were sick, we were sick at home; when we were born, we were born at home. Now we come home to sleep. Occasionally we eat there. We even change our standards of morals. "Go to" used to be a mouth-filling oath, to-day it is utterly toothless. Yesterday a minister might take a toddy in order to prepare himself for his pulpit ministration, to-day such conduct would disgrace him.

Truly "the old order changeth." This is true whether we seek to help the process or to hinder it, whether we favor it or object. As a matter of fact, there are some who do object, and that very strenuously. I have known more than one doughty knight in our own day to squander his energies fighting against the oncoming phalanx of change. I have seen more than one such fall with hacked armor, broken sword, and broken heart in the hopeless combat. Nor am I going to judge such harshly. Of course, all of us who have reached middle life know that when we were boys and girls, youth was somewhat

as it ought to be. We naturally, therefore, deplore the present evil generation.

But whether welcome or unwelcome, I repeat, change is a persistent fact in the world in which we live. We may stand in the midst of this change and sob,

> "The time is out of joint—O cursèd spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right."

Or we may take the more optimistic and Christian view and sing,

> "Not in vain the distance beckons, Forward,
> Forward let us range,
> Let the great world spin forever down the
> raining grooves of change."

Happy is he who accepts change with a wise conservatism, salvaging from the past that which is really worthwhile, at the same time giving hearty hospitality to what is good in the living present.

But even to those who welcome change, it brings no abiding newness. Were it so, we should be the most surprised, thrilled and delighted generation the world has ever seen. Scores of things are accepted by us as the merest commonplaces that even a quarter of a century ago would have been regarded as little short of miracles. But in spite of this we are not thrilled. We are rather bored. The prevailing tone of our age, one of our leading philosophers tells us, is one of sadness. Our toys soon cease to please us. We do not tune in on our radios quite as eagerly as we did. Even the movies are losing their

grip. Attendance upon these has fallen off thirty-three and one-third per cent. in recent months. All things change whether we share Paul's secret or not. But if all things are to become new, we must enter into his experience.

What, then, did Paul mean? The newness of which he speaks was not in the world without, but in the world within. Paul himself had become new. He was a new creation in Christ Jesus. Given a new man, we have a new world, a new universe. This is true because we see the world with our own eyes and make from within us the world we see. To the man whose inner self is old and fagged, all life is old, and there is truly no new thing under the sun. But to him who has been reborn, it cannot be otherwise than that all things have become new.

III

What are some of the things that are become new?

1. The world of nature has become new. A missionary with a converted Chinaman at his side stood looking out upon a sea that was dotted by lovely green islands. "How beautiful!" said the converted Chinaman. The missionary turned in surprise. "I did not know that your people admired such things." "We do not," was the answer. "I never saw anything beautiful; I never even looked until I found Jesus. He has made the difference." Sam Hadley tells us that after his conversion he went out and looked up at the stars and admired their beauty. He declared that it was the first time he had seen them in seven years. It is this experience that causes the moun-

tains and the hills to break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field to clap their hands. Beauty within makes beauty without, and the song of the soul makes a songful world.

"Skies above are softer blue,
Earth around is sweeter green.
Something lives in every hue
Christless eyes have never seen.
Birds with gladder songs overflow,
Flowers with richer glories shine
Since I know, as now I know,
I am His and He is mine."

2. The world of men becomes new. We look on them in different fashion when we see them through eyes that have seen the Cross. "England has forty millions population, mainly fools," wrote Carlyle. "The world has so many million population, mainly Gentile dogs," would have been the declaration of Paul before his conversion. There were even many of his own people whom he regarded as nothing more than outcasts. But that is no longer the case. Now he sees in every man a brother for whom Christ died. Now he has taken the whole world to his heart. He loves the foreigner. He loves those who are indifferent to him. He loves those who are hostile. "I am willing to spend and be spent for you," he writes, "though the more I love you, the less I be loved."

3. Through his experience our daily task becomes new. There sits Paul working far into the night. He is making tents. It seems rather a sordid and commonplace task, but the task is not sordid. He is working

under the inspiration of Him who loved him and gave Himself for him. No task is small when we can look up from it and say, "To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world that I might do this bit of work for my Lord." Every task is transfigured that we perform in His fellowship and for His sake.

4. All our religious duties become new. The worship of the sanctuary becomes new. How greatly some people dread to go to church. They have never entered into the experience of the Psalmist who said, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the House of the Lord." They are frankly bored while he is saying in awed gladness, "Surely God is in this place." This experience makes the great hymns of the Church new. They become vital vehicles for the expression of our own discoveries and triumphs, our hopes and aspirations. The Word of God becomes new. Its promises become personal to ourselves. Its consolations are a comforting hand laid upon our own fevered forehead. Giving becomes new. It is transformed from drudgery to privilege. Prayer becomes new. It is changed from a form to a force, from a talking into space to communion with a Friend.

5. Then this experience transforms our foes. As a Christian, you will be in no sense exempt from conflict and heartache. You will still be acquainted with grief, disappointment, and tears. But sorrow will wear a different face when you meet it in the conviction that "All things work together for good to them that love God." Even death becomes new. It ceases to be the grim foe that wrecks all beauty and blasts all hope. It becomes the

servant that flings open the door that admits us into a larger life. Happy, therefore, is he who can say out of his own experience, "All things are become new."

There are some here present whose lighted faces indicate that they can give their personal testimony to the truth of what I have been saying. There are others, I dare to hope, who long to know and who even now are saying wistfully,

"I wish that there were some wonderful place
Called the Land of Beginning-Again
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches
And all our poor selfish grief
Might be dropped, like a shabby old coat, at the door,
And never put on again."

There is such a place. That place is here. There is such a time. That time is now. This is true because He is here who says, "Behold, I make all things new." I close, therefore, by wishing for every one of you a blessed *New* year.

IV

A GREAT BELIEVER—PAUL

Acts 27: 25

"Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

THIS is one of the most gripping stories in the New Testament. In fact, it would be hard to find a finer anywhere. As we read it we cannot but realize how splendid it is to be a Christian. We cannot but realize what a superb and mighty something is faith. What a benefactor a real believer is! No wonder Luke told this story at length. It is as thrilling as marshal music and as comforting as the Everlasting Arms.

I

As the story opens there is a small group in conference on the deck of a merchant vessel in the port of Fair Havens, off the coast of Crete. Four men are present at this conference. First, there is a Roman officer named Julius. He is a courageous man and a gentleman. He represents the military power of Rome. Second, there is the owner of the vessel. He perhaps owns the cargo as well. He represents capital. Third, there is the captain

or pilot of the ship. He is a man of the sea. The fourth man, Paul by name, is one whose presence is a bit surprising. He does not belong to the army. Neither is he a man of wealth nor a man of the sea. He is a traveling preacher. He is a member of a despised sect of a despised nation. Furthermore, he is a prisoner. He is on his way to Rome to stand trial. Yet, strange to say, we find him present at this conference.

The matter under consideration is this: Shall they winter in the harbor of Fair Havens or shall they go fifty miles farther up the coast to the more commodious harbor of Phenice? Paul is for remaining at Fair Havens. He has had much experience with the sea and is convinced that to undertake to make the better harbor will be dangerous. The owner of the vessel and its captain are of a contrary opinion. It is a lovely day in early autumn. There is a gentle south wind that is as soft as the breath of an infant. The skies are beautifully blue and the sea is calm. They are aware, of course, that they have reached that season of the year when sailing is dangerous. Still they feel sure that they can, without serious risk, reach the more desirable port of Phenice. They argue, therefore, the wisdom of setting sail at once. But the final decision belongs to Captain Julius. This is true because this merchant vessel is in government service. Julius is not a man of the sea. Therefore, he does the most natural and reasonable thing under the circumstances. He takes the opinion of the pilot and owner of the vessel. They are men of experience and are for this reason most to be trusted. Therefore, they weigh anchor and set sail.

But they had little more than gotten out of the harbor when the skies became overcast. The gentle south wind whipped suddenly round to the northeast and became a furious hurricane. The ship was caught and was unable to hold her course. The first day they ran under the shelter of an island where they were able to haul the lifeboat on deck. They then proceeded to undergird the ship because it was threatening to fall to pieces. The second day the storm had not abated, so they lightened the ship by throwing some of the cargo overboard. The third day they threw over whatever furnishings of the ship could be spared. They had now done all toward their safety that seemed humanly possible. Therefore, they were forced to sit in idleness while the tempest raged.

Then followed a fifth day of storm and a sixth, then a seventh. Meantime, it was impossible to adequately prepare food. There was little eating. Many were too sick to eat. Others were too hopeless and fearful of coming doom. The persistent fury of the hurricane was slowly but surely wearing away their morale. Then followed other tempestuous days, dreary and sunless; and hideous nights of terror when there were no stars. At last almost two weeks had gone and the tempest still blew with unabated fury. The strain was too great. The ordeal was too heavy for human nature to bear without loss of courage. "When neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away." It is easy to believe that. These men were not naturally cowards, many of them, but the strain had been too long. Death

had been creeping upon them hour by hour. At last hope had given way to utter despair.

Now, it is ever a black hour when men lose hope. A hopeless man is of no value to himself or to anyone else. Despair unmans us. When we lose hope we are likely to throw life away as an utter paltry and worthless something. I looked into the face of a suicide some time ago. It was a pathetic face. Why, I wondered, did he fling out the back door of life? The answer of those dumb lips seemed to be, "I lost hope. To-day was drab and gray. I saw a troop of to-morrows coming as hopeless as to-day. I could not face them, I did not have the courage to carry on. Therefore, I threw my life away." In despair he threw away that which to many of us, thank God, is so precious.

II

But hope for this desperate crew was on the way to a resurrection. They would never have believed such a thing possible. It was a dream entirely too good to come true. Yet it did come true and in a most amazing fashion. There they are, huddled together on the deck. They are soaked by the waves. They are hunger-pinched. They are fear-filled. They are in utter despair. There is nothing for them to do, they feel sure, but wait for the tragic end.

But, wonderful to tell, the expected disaster does not come. Hope comes in its stead. For suddenly Paul stands forth in the midst of them. This preacher whose presence had meant so little at the beginning of the voyage now began to count. He comes out from some

secret place of prayer, steadies himself with great difficulty upon the slippery deck, and shouts his heartening word. Yes, while the vessel plunges, and while the water splashes in its hull, and while the wind shrieks, and while death laughs with hollow laughter among the torn shreds of the rigging, Paul lifts his voice above it all and cries, "Be of good cheer." What a gallant soul! What a benefactor, especially if he has any real basis for his cheer.

"Be of good cheer." How does he dare utter a word like that? Is he offering these despairing men a false hope? On what does he base his call to hope and courage?

He does not base it on anything tangible or visible. He does not tell them to be of good courage because of the skill of the pilot. He does not tell them to be of courage by reminding them that they have a Roman officer on board. These are no doubt courageous men, but they do not count now. He does not remind them of the seaworthiness of the vessel. It is not seaworthy, it has become water-logged and is threatening to go to pieces. He does not tell them that the storm is lulling and that the skies are clearing. Such is not the case. He bases his cheer, therefore, on none of these things.

Neither does he base his cheer on a denial of the reality of the dangers that threaten. Some would have said, "Be of good cheer, there is no storm." "Be of good cheer, the ship is not going to wreck, there is really no ship to be wrecked." "Be of good cheer, this sea that 'curls its lip and lies in wait and lifts its teeth as if to bite,' really has

no existence." "Be of good cheer, do not be afraid of death for there is really no such thing as death."

But Paul never sought to encourage himself or others by shutting his eyes to facts. This same word of cheer was often upon the lips of his Master. But it was not born of blindness. Jesus was never afraid to look the truth in the face. When the paralyzed man was put at His feet He recognized the ravages that sin had brought. Yet He said, "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee." When he had reached the end of the way and His foot was on the threshold of death, He recognized its tragic reality but said, "Be of good cheer, for I have overcome." Paul along with his Master offered no cheer that was born of deliberate blindness.

On what then did he base his call to hope and to courage? He based it on faith in God. "Be of good cheer, for I believe God." He was a man who dared to stand up in the presence of what seemed inevitable disaster and recite his creed. "I believe God," he declares. "I belong to Him, He belongs to me. I have been and am in communion with Him. I have asked Him not simply for my own life, I have asked Him for every one of you. He has given me His word that He is going to save you. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

III

What is the outcome? What was the good of having this mighty believer on board? What did Paul's faith do for him and others? When he said, "I believe God," he

did not sit down and leave matters alone altogether. He did himself, and insisted on his fellows doing, all that was humanly possible. Real faith leads to action. To claim to believe and do nothing is sheer presumption. Paul did something.

1. He saw to it that he himself and those with him should be as physically fit as possible for the hard ordeal that was ahead of them. Therefore, he urged upon them the necessity of eating. He himself set the example and took a bit of food and standing among those hunger-weakened soldiers and sailors asked a blessing and began to eat. And as they saw him eating they too had the courage to do likewise.

2. Paul held them together. To-day the last to leave the foundering vessel is the captain and his crew, but it was not so then. These sailors sought to escape in the only lifeboat that they had. Paul was the only man clear-eyed enough to recognize this cowardly piece of trickery. Therefore, he said to Captain Julius, "Unless these remain in the ship we cannot be saved." Then the sailors took their short swords and cut the ropes and let the boat fall into the sea. Thus Paul held them together. Faith is ever a uniting force. Our world must be held together by faith in a common God or it cannot be saved.

3. Paul brought courage and hope to men who were in utter despair. What a benediction is that! Cowardice is contagious. A man in a panic can often frighten a whole community. But, thank God, courage is also contagious. When they saw the calmness and the hopefulness that looked out from the eyes of Paul they themselves began to hope. "Then were they of good

cheer," says the story. Happy is the man that can change cowardice into courage and black despair into radiant hope.

4. Finally, Paul saved the situation. When the vessel wrecked there was no panic. Every man seems to have faced the ordeal with calmness and courage. Those who could swim jumped into the sea first. This they did that they might be able to help others. Then followed those who could not swim, and not one of them was drowned. "Some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land." And the man who brought about this salvation was Paul, the mighty believer.

It is ever the believer who wins in his own personal life. It is the believer who is most fruitful in his efforts on behalf of others. When I was quite a young preacher I was sent to a charge that was torn into shreds by strife within the church. It was one of the most depressing situations that I have ever faced. Of the charges that I have served, none came so near to driving me to despair. In the realization that something must be done I decided to undertake a revival. To assist me in this work I sent for a friend of mine who was not a minister. He was a farmer, but he was mighty in prayer. He came and we began the meeting.

Day after day went by with no slightest sign of life amid the utter spiritual deadness. Meantime, one after another of the most faithful people of the congregation was coming to me with remarks like this: "There is no use to go on. It is impossible to do anything with this situation. It has been tried before, but always with the

results that you are meeting now." We would listen, I somewhat depressed, but my friend always with radiant face. When this incarnate despair had finished my friend would always give the same answer: "You would not say that if you knew the Lord as I know Him."

Thus the days went by with my praying brother leaning heavily upon God and with myself leaning, I am afraid, prettly largely on him. At last ten days had gone. Then one night I went into the service. My friend, who was there ahead of me, saw me coming and hurried to meet me. He said, "Say what the Lord tells you to say to-night, the victory has come." I preached my sermon and made an appeal. There was not a move. I said, "Those desiring to go home may do so." A very few went. Then I made another appeal. Then followed such a service as I have seldom seen. It was the beginning of a moral revolution. That church and that community have never been the same since. The secret of the victory was the presence of one who believed God. "Truly this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

V

AT THE CROSS—PAUL

Titus 2: 14

"Who gave Himself up for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

I

"WHO gave Himself up for us." The text brings us at once face to face with the Cross. Here is one who is suffering on our behalf. He is suffering to the point of ghastly death. But death is not being forced upon him. Life is not being wrenched from grudging hands and clinging fingers. It is being given. "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself."

To have any creature willingly suffer for us is an arresting experience. I read some years ago of a hunter who was so closely pursued by a bear that he had wounded that he was unable to recharge his gun. When he could almost feel the hot breath of the enraged beast upon his neck, his faithful dog ran in and took his part. The bear made short work of the dog, but the hunter had time to reload his gun and thus to save his life. When the bear was dead, he went and gathered the mangled body of

the lifeless dog in his arms and sobbed over it like a broken-hearted child. And his tears did him credit. It is an arresting thing to have been died for, even by a dog.

That which makes the word "mother" about the sweetest in our language is that her name is a synonym for sacrifice. Real mothers are constantly giving themselves for their children. This is true from that trying hour when she gropes through the valley of the shadow of death to lift the little life into the light on to the end of the journey. "There stood by the Cross of Jesus, Mary, His mother." That is where mothers have always stood. That is the reason her children rise up and call her blessed. For it is a startling and an arresting something, I repeat, for anyone to love us well enough to part with life for us.

The one bit of beauty about the bald ugliness of war is the heroic self-giving of those who are glad to die for others. Here, for instance, is a splendid young fellow going out to battle. He has a keen appreciation of the prizes that must be surrendered at the call of patriotism and duty. He also has a keen appreciation of the tragic suffering to be endured. Yet he pays the price without flinching and with a splendid gallantry that grips our hearts and tends to wet our faces with tears.

"I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade
When Spring comes round with rustling shade
And apple blossoms fill the air.
I have a rendezvous with Death
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.

"It may be he shall take my hand
And lead me into his dark land
And close my eyes and quench my breath;
It may be I shall pass him still.
I have a rendezvous with Death
On some scarred slope of battered hill,
When Spring comes round again this year
And the first meadow flowers appear.

"God knows 'twere better to be deep
Pillowed in silk and scented down,
Where love throbs out in blissful sleep,
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
Where hushed awakenings are dear. . . .
But I've a rendezvous with Death
At midnight in some flaming town,
When Spring trips north again this year,
And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail that rendezvous."

And he did not fail. Therefore, his youthful body sleeps in an untimely grave.

But to have been sacrificed for, to have been died for, by the Christ of God is surely the most compelling fact in all human history. It is the most revolutionary and the most transforming. For the death of Jesus was infinitely more than the death of a martyr. In the suffering of Jesus, God suffered. Jesus was not standing between an angry God and His estranged child. The attitude of Jesus to lost man is God's attitude. The heartbreak of Jesus is the heartbreak of God. Jesus on the Cross is God on the Cross. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."

Christ died for us because He could meet our need in no other way. Calvary was neither an accident nor a blunder. I do not for a moment claim fully to fathom the mystery of it. But I do know from the lips of Jesus Himself that thus it behooved Christ to suffer. And that sentence that is the epitome of the whole gospel says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish." That is, without this sacrificial death you and I were in danger of being lost and lost forever.

Then Jesus was eager to give Himself up because He loves us. His love is comprehensive, it is universal. But thank God, it is also personal and individual. He never loses the individual in the mass. It is thrilling to read, "God so loved the world." But it is more thrilling to be able to say, "He loved me and gave Himself up for me." The mother does not love her children as a group, she loves them as individuals. So it is that we are loved by Him who gave Himself up for us. "He calleth His own sheep by name."

II

What was the purpose of the Cross? What was Jesus seeking to gain by the giving up of Himself? According to our text, the purpose of Jesus was twofold.

1. He gave Himself up for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity. The fact that we need redemption implies bondage. The necessity of our being set free is a declaration of our slavery. This clashes somewhat, I know, with some of our modern ways of thinking. But it is in harmony with the teachings of the Bible. It is espe-

cially in harmony with the teachings of Jesus. Many are ready to say in our day as certain Jews said to Him, "We were never in bondage to any man." But Jesus answered as He still answers, "He that committeth sin is the bondslave of sin."

Not only is this the teaching of the Scriptures, but it is the teaching of experience. When Paul declared that he found himself doing the thing that he hated and failing to do the thing that he most yearned to accomplish, he was speaking the universal language of humanity. Of course, not all feel the galling bondage of it as keenly as did this great saint. He felt it so keenly that it made him unspeakably wretched. "Who shall deliver me?" he cries in a passion of agony. "Christ will," he answers. Then with the joy of one who has gone from bondage to freedom he writes, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit of life hath made me free."

This sense of freedom is one that belongs in stronger or lesser degree to all the saints. It was the joy of Bunyan's Pilgrim when his burden was loosed from his shoulders at the sight of the Cross. John Newton, who had sinned greatly and who had greatly repented and been greatly saved, gloried especially in the fact that he had been set free. So much was this the case that he printed this text in large letters and hung it above the mantelpiece of his study: "Remmeber that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and that the Lord thy God delivered thee."

This freedom that Christ brings is to be full and complete. He has come to "redeem us from all iniquity."

"He is able to save unto the uttermost." He claims that he can deal adequately and victoriously and conqueringly with every sin in every human life. His is a perfect and complete redemption. "Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins."

2. Jesus gave Himself for us that He might "purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." That is, He is seeking by the sacrifice of Himself to make us His very own, His peculiar possession. And how do we become His very own? Here is a man who dares speak of a pure and noble woman as his own. He calls her "my wife." How did she become his? In only one way. She gave herself to him for love's sake. So Christ seeks to possess us. We become truly His only as we give ourselves to Him in response to His love. And that love is never so irresistibly seen as at the foot of the Cross.

"When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

. . . . .

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

Now it is in this power of the Cross to take captive our hearts that we begin to find some explanation of its supreme power to redeem. We realize, of course, that

there is a certain redemptive power in every noble love. In *A Tale of Two Cities* there is a dissipated rake named Sidney Carton. So low had he sunk that they called him the Jackal. The name of this cowardly and sneaking beast seemed most appropriate for one who had so utterly "wasted his substance with riotous living." But one day the Jackal's heart is taken captive by a woman of rare beauty of soul. He was never privileged to marry her. She becomes the wife of another. But that love led to his transformation. So fully was he remade that there came a time when he was glad to die for her and for those dear to her. And when he went to his death, a little seamstress who was to die with him found him "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." And those who saw him die said that his face was the most peaceful into which they had ever looked.

How many men and women have been made better and purer by the love of a little child. I think of the old Organ Grinder in *The Road Mender*. One day he was grinding out uncouth tunes in an uncouth street when a little soiled-faced girl lifted her lips to his to be kissed. But he was hard and cruel and selfish. He merely slapped her face and moved on. A little later an accident happened to him and he was carried to a hospital. There he had time to think. The face of the little girl haunted him. He resolved that when he was well he would find her and seek to atone in some way for his cruelty. So when he had recovered, he bought those records that children like best and set out to find her. For long he searched, but he never found her. But he did find other children. He also found a more tender heart and a purer life. In

fact, he even ended by finding the Christ of little children.

Such has also been the experience of many a father and mother.

"To feel his little hand in mine, so clinging and so warm,
To know he thinks me strong enough to keep him safe
from harm;
To see his simple faith in all that I can say or do.
It sort o' shames a fellow, but it makes him better, too;
And I am trying hard to be the man he fancies me to be,
Because I have this chap at home who thinks the world
o' me.

I would not disappoint his trust for anything on earth,
Nor let him know how little I just naturally am worth,
But after all, it's easier, that bright road to climb,
With the little hands behind me to push me all the time.
And I reckon I'm a better man than what I used to be
Because I have this chap at home who thinks the world
o' me."

Now if there is a transforming power in a noble human love, how much more is this the case when we come to love the Highest, even Him who gave Himself up for us. But we must remember that the redemption wrought by Christ is of value to us personally only as we give ourselves to the Redeemer. It is only as He takes captive our hearts that He is able to set us free. The measure of our emancipation is the measure of consecration. To be partially His is to enjoy only partial freedom. To be wholly His is to be wholly free.

To be thus set free is to be fired by a holy zeal. For the

people who are genuinely conquered by Christ are ever a passionate people. But their passion is not getting, but giving. It is not being served, but serving. To be peculiarly His is to share His enthusiasm for doing good. That is an outstanding characteristic of the saints through all the centuries. How do we account for Paul, for instance? His fingers are busy at night making tents. With the coming of day he is in eager pursuit of men. He braves shipwreck. He is locked in prison. His feet mark all Roman roads. He suffers the loss of all things. What is the motive power that drives him on? Had you asked him, this would have been his answer: "He loved me and gave Himself for me." And that same power has been the motive force that has sent eager sons and daughters of God to remake the world.

We are coming now to the communion table. "This do," He said, "in remembrance of Me." This is a memorial supper. That upon which our minds are fixed especially is the death of Jesus. "This is my body which is given for you." We are to look past the symbol to Him who is symbolized. We are to fix our hearts and minds on Him Who loved us. May His love conquer our wayward hearts! May we receive Him as our Lord and our Redeemer. May He become the Bread of Life to our souls. Strengthened by that holy Bread, may we go out to spend our lives for others, even as he spent His life for us.

VI

A SUCCESSFUL SERVICE—PETER

Acts 10: 33

"Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."

HERE is the record of a service that really succeeded. That is more than you can say for every service. I have attended services that left me with a feeling that they had been utter failures. When the benediction was pronounced the people as they went away did not give the impression that they had been in green pastures beside still waters. They rather seemed to have been trudging through a desert or spending an hour in a dentist's chair. More than once I have felt like asking some wretched-looking worshiper, "Did it hurt much to-day?" But this service was a success. Those present were helped and inspired. Some of them were completely transformed. I venture to say that not one who was present that day ever forgot this service. They spoke of it years afterward with glad and grateful tears. Yet it was a service that belongs no more to a far-off yesterday than it belongs to to-day.

There were four factors that entered into its success.

We may still have these in our own churches Sunday after Sunday if we are only willing to pay the price.

I

The first factor that contributed to the success of this service was the audience.

There are those who fancy that the success of a service depends almost solely upon the preacher. At least upon the preacher and the choir. But no greater mistake was ever made. The audience has a part to play that is tremendously important. There are audiences that can almost breathe life into the dead. There are other audiences that can quench one's ardor and throw buckets of cold water on one's enthusiasm. There are audiences that can turn their backs on the preacher and look him squarely in the eye at the same time. They can make him cry, in the midst of the Slough of Despond into which they have flung him, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?"

But this audience got the very best out of the preacher, and gave the very best to the service. Why?

1. It was a present audience. That sounds trite, I know. But a present audience is the only kind with which the preacher is likely to have any success. There is something depressing in a large church with nobody in it. I have heard ministers say that they could preach just as well to a handful as to a houseful. Possibly so, under certain circumstances. But that is not the rule. Personally, I could never have much enthusiasm in preaching to a lumberyard, even though it was highly polished. Nor

did my enthusiasm increase when some repressed and discouraged brother thanked the Lord in his prayer "that where two or three are gathered together," etc. It is a very beautiful promise and ought to bring us great joy. But you lose the thrill of it somewhat in the realization that the brother who is praying is not half so conscious of the Divine Presence as he is of the human absence.

"We are all here present." That is an audience that inspires. To such an audience the preacher can speak hopefully. But it is impossible for him to so speak to those who are absent or to those who are with him only in spirit. A brother in my church used to excuse his almost constant absence by saying, "I could not be with you Sunday, but I was with you in spirit." Finally I said to him, "Brother, I think spirits are in a measure like dogs. If you cannot come along to look after them, you had better keep them at home." An audience of ghosts is a most depressing audience, and when it comes to the taking of the offering, such an audience counts for naked nothing.

2. This was a reverent audience. Now it is not speaking in a critical spirit to say that reverence is not one of the characteristics of our day. Irvin Cobb, whom I do not regard as a really great theologian, said, "If you examine the bump of reverence on the head of the modern man you will find it to be a dent." Yet reverence is vastly important. It is the gateway to knowledge. We never find our way into the secret place of the Most High on flippant and irreverent feet.

3. It was an expectant audience. It is easy for a

speaker to tell whether his audience is expecting anything. There are some audiences that collapse as soon as the speaker arises to begin his message. There are others that become alert and alive and lean wistfully forward to hear what he has to say. There are two kinds of audiences that help the speaker. One is the audience that is enthusiastically for him. The other is the audience that is enthusiastically against him. The audience that kills is the one that stifles a yawn and says, "I have heard him before." A bullet can penetrate a piece of plate steel easily enough, but where can you find a bullet that can pierce a six-foot bank of snow? The snow greets it with a kiss of icy welcome, offers freezingly to join it in its crusade, and puts it to sleep long before it has reached its goal.

Some years ago a friend of mine who had been taken suddenly ill asked me to fill his place as the Commencement speaker at a certain college. Now it so happened that this man was not only brilliant, but of magnificent appearance. But in spite of this, for friendship's sake, I consented to go. I reached the seat of the college just in the gloaming. I did not know the president of the institution, but I noticed a gentleman whose head was working up and down as he eyed everyone who got off the train. I was sure he was the man, and since I do not often get to see a professor's head work, I waited and watched and enjoyed the process till the passengers for that station were out and the train was on its way again. I then stepped boldly forward and said, "You are looking for Dr. A.?" "Yes, yes," he said. "He was to deliver our Commencement address and he has not come." "He is

not coming," I answered with admirable courage. "He was taken suddenly ill and has sent me in his place." The shot went home. I saw him stagger under the impact of it. At last he pulled himself together and said, "Well, I guess we might as well go up to the hall." "Well, I guess we had," I replied.

To the hall we went. There was a magnificent audience. But what an honest man this college president was! This was his introduction. "I am sorry to announce that Dr. A. has been taken suddenly ill and could not come. He has sent Dr. Chapell in his place. I don't know him. I suppose he is all right or he would not have sent him." With that enthusiastic introduction I began. Starting thus at zero, there was only one way that I could travel and that was up. I have seldom had a more delightful hearing. The audience expected nothing. They were enthusiastically against me, but at least they were awake. An expectant audience is a great asset, but the audience that is positively antagonistic is far better than the one that has substituted shock absorbers for a lively expectation.

Not only was this an expectant audience, but its expectation was of the finest possible quality. It was not built upon Peter's reputation as an orator or as a scholar. It had a far finer foundation. These people had been praying for light and leading. In answer to their prayers, God had sent them a preacher. Therefore, they were right in indulging the highest expectation regarding the message of this man. He had been sent in answer to their prayers.

II

The second factor that entered into the making of this service a success was the preacher.

I am well aware that if the preachers were put to a popular vote to-day they would not be unanimously elected. I read an article a few years ago in one of our leading magazines where the writer said that the least farmer contributed more to human well-being in the course of a year than did any preacher. But one trouble with this man was that he and our Lord do not agree. For some reason, through the centuries God has made use of preachers. When He wanted to lead Cornelius and his friends into the light, He had to have a preacher. He had plenty of angels, but the best that an angel could do for this man was to tell him where he could get a preacher. Through the years, it has pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

It is refreshing also to see what an exalted opinion this Roman centurion had of the ministry. What an introduction he gave the preacher that day! "We are all here present before God to hear all things commanded thee of God." He was convinced that Peter was a man under divine orders. He was a man who was living in the circle of divine will. It was his conviction that this preacher had a message to deliver that had been given him from above. He was not speaking from himself. God had spoken to him. He had listened to the divine message. The Lord had given him the tongue of the learned, that he should know how to speak a word in season to him that was weary. Therefore, he might rightly

begin his sermon by saying, "Thus saith the Lord." Such was this centurion's idea of the ministry. And happy for Peter that he did not disappoint him.

III

The third factor that entered into the success of this service was the sermon.

Speaking now, as Paul would say, "not from inspiration," I have an idea that the choir did not sing the congregation into utter exhaustion before Peter began his sermon. This often happens in our day. By this I do not mean to say that the choir is of no importance. It is of great importance. The preacher and the choir are workers together at a common task. They are undertaking to win souls to Christ and to build up souls in Christ. But it is my conviction that the preaching of the gospel through the sermon is central. Woe unto the church whose chief drawing power is its choir. Woe unto the preacher who allows himself to become a mere appendix to his choir. A religious choir that can sing and quit is a blessing from the Lord. But a professional choir that insists on making of every service an endurance contest is one plague that Pharaoh escaped.

Speaking further without inspiration, I hardly believe that Peter prayed his audience into weariness in his opening prayer. It is my opinion that if the average preacher would leave out three-fourths of his prayer each Sunday morning, the Lord would be in no sense grieved and the people would be greatly blessed and edified. The man who asks for everything every time in his opening prayer,

usually expects nothing and gets what he expects. Prayer is, of course, primarily an approach to God. The preacher carries his needs and those of his people into the divine presence. But he may so prolong even this beautiful act of worship that the congregation is not helped, but is rather made nervous and impatient.

Some years ago a distinguished gentleman was preaching in my pulpit. His opening prayer was a kind of Pathé Weekly. I confess I did not know the names and the doings of the various royal families and the government officials of the world until I overheard him talking about them that morning. When he finished that prayer, if one might so label such an oration, people left by every available exit. It was "to your tents, O Israel."

Peter preached. The record says that Peter opened his mouth. That is an excellent beginning. It is fine when a preacher gets his mouth open. Many a preacher spends all his ministry talking through a slit. "Peter opened his mouth." That speaks of spontaneity. There is a winsome naturalness about it. It tells us that there were Niagaras of conviction in the man's heart. He was so filled with his joyous and transforming message that to open his lips was to spill out a gospel.

His theme was great and roomy and fascinating. He spoke of salvation. He told what salvation is. It means reconciliation with the Father. It is the healing of the tragic quarrel of the soul with God. He declared that this salvation was in reach of all men. That its condition was faith and faith only. "To Him gave all the prophets witness that through His name, whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sin."

IV

The final factor that entered into the success of this service was the results. Did anything happen when Peter preached? Were any marvelous transformations wrought? Did any beneficent changes take place? Does anything happen when we preach? Do we expect anything to happen? A preacher had far better lose his eyesight than to lose the expectation out of his heart. God have mercy on us when we get to the place where we can listlessly preach the gospel of the grace of God without any expectation that anything worth while will come as a result of our preaching.

What, I repeat, was the outcome of this service? I met Cornelius the next day and said, "I understand that you had the preacher with you yesterday." "Yes," he answered, with a strange lack of enthusiasm. "Well, how was the service?" "Oh, so, so," he answered. "Fairly good, I suppose, as such things go. Mrs. Cornelius said it was a very scholarly sermon, very profound. But I confess that I never quite got the drift of what he was talking about. When I saw that he was going to preach to the man in the moon I went to sleep and left it with him."

No, Cornelius did not say that. He understood what the preacher said. Our congregations will understand us if we ourselves know what we are talking about. A brother in the ministry said to me some time ago: "My message is to the intellectually élite." I could not but say within myself, "My friend, you have a small audience." Blessed is the preacher that so speaks that the humblest

man in his congregation can get hold of the Bread of Life. The time has certainly passed when any large number of people are going to come to church to puzzle their minds over what the preacher is talking about. He must speak not so a wise man can understand him, but so a "mutton-head" cannot help but understand him.

"Cornelius, how was the service?" And with radiant face he tells me about it. "As the preacher told us how that salvation was for everybody on the simple condition of faith, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I saw the peace of a great discovery looking out from the eye of those about me. And while Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on all that heard the word."

Fifty years later I imagine Cornelius, now an old man, was living in retirement at home. A little laddie climbs into his lap and hugs his neck and says, "Grandpa, tell me a story." The kindly old man answers, "Grandpa doesn't know any more stories. He has told you all that he knows." But the little fellow persists. "Tell me about that time when you were praying and God sent an angel and told you where to find a preacher." The genial old face brightens and he says, "Oh, do you want to hear that again?" It is the story that he likes best to tell.

"A long time ago," he begins, "when your father was a little chap like you . . ." Then he goes through with the story with an interest and enthusiasm as if he were telling it the first time. When his voice has become silent, the little lad is so still that the old man wonders if he is asleep. Then he begins to question. "Did the preacher come when you sent for him?" "Yes, he came," was the

answer. "Did he tell you about Jesus?" "Yes, he told me about Jesus." "Was what the preacher said true?" is the next question. Then the old saint hugs him hard and answers, "Yes, it is true. I have tested it out for half a century. It is gloriously true." "Will Jesus take little fellows like me?" "Yes," he answers as the tears shimmer in his glad old eyes. "He said, 'Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not.' " Thus the wilderness and solitary place become glad, and the deserts rejoice and blossom as the rose.

VII

KEPT—PETER*

I Peter 1: 5

"Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

"KEPT by the power of God." What a heartening word! Peter writes it with a kind of joyous swagger. How secure he feels! How it builds a fortress about him in the presence of his enemies! How it quiets his fears! How comforting, like the sheltering arms of a mother to a tired and frightened child! "Kept by the power of God." Surely he who has that protection has security enough. Surely a refuge so strong leaves nothing more to be desired. Certainly the most timid soul alive ought to rest within the shadow of these great words in perfect joy and peace.

I

"Kept by the power of God." Who are these elect souls? Who are these that are so blessed? They are not certainly people on whom worldly fortune has especially smiled. They are not those who have grown rich and

*The sermon first appeared in *Great Southern Preaching,* published by the Macmillan Company, and is here reproduced with one or two changes, through the courtesy of the publishers.

powerful and strong. They are not the people who have waded through slaughter to a throne. They are not those who are exempt from the world's ills and who have somehow won their way to ease and wealth and fame. The Apostle speaks of them as strangers scattered abroad over the earth. For the most part they are persecuted, impoverished, and despised. Yet they are kept by the power of God.

Who are they? They are the twice born. They are those who have been begotten again. They are people who have passed out of death unto life. They have become partakers of the divine Nature. They are those who have received Jesus, and through receiving Him have become sons and daughters of the Most High. They are the children of the Kingdom. Of course, there is a sense in which all men are kept by the power of God. But He reserves His peculiar and full and complete keeping for those who have given themselves to Him by a definite surrender.

II

And notice who keeps them! That is the most heartening part of the text. Who is the keeper of these scattered strangers? Who is the keeper of these weak and persecuted saints? Who is your keeper? Somebody is. At least somebody is trying to be. I wonder if that somebody is equal to the task. Happy is the man who has a keeper who is abundantly able to accomplish that which he undertakes.

It may be that you are your own keeper. There are many men who have undertaken that difficult rôle. The

rich farmer of whom Jesus tells thought he was sufficient for the task. He did not ask God or man to keep him. He felt able to keep himself. He thought he could accomplish the task by raising large crops and building roomy barns. But he was miserably disappointed. His efforts ended in utter and heartbreaking disaster.

There was a time when Napoleon felt adequate to the task of keeping himself. He had won victory after victory. So thoroughly had he swept everything before him that he declared that God was on the side of the strongest battalions, that is, that God was not a factor to be reckoned with at all. He himself was sufficient. He could ignore God. In the grip of that idea he marched on Russia. Under the same impression, he went to Waterloo. But, as with the rich farmer, the end was disaster. Napoleon could not keep himself. His crown slipped from his brow, and his scepter slipped from his hand. And all he had at the end of the day was an old pair of military boots that he insisted on having upon his cold feet when he died.

It is fine to have the backing of a great nation. I rejoice in the privilege of living under the Stars and Stripes. I remember coming into Hampton Roads some years ago when the American Fleet was drawn up there. As we passed those great battleships one by one, I was prideful enough to congratulate myself on being an American, and of feeling the security that comes from having a great fleet and a great nation behind me. It is fine to be a citizen of a mighty nation and to enjoy the keeping power which that nation gives.

Some years ago a man was arrested in far-off Abys-

sinia and thrown into jail. It so happened that the man arrested was a subject of the British Empire. It was six months before the news of his arrest reached London. A demand for his release was sent out. That demand was ignored. Ten thousand men were then put upon transports and sent to the rescue of this one British subject. They landed at the nearest port, marched seven hundred miles, battered down the prison door, and brought their fellow citizen liberty. I suppose he appreciated as never before the fact that he was a part of the British Empire; that he was kept by the power of Great Britain.

But these scattered strangers spoken of in the text are far more fortunate than he. They are kept by the power of God. They are in the keeping of Him in the hollow of whose hand "the seas rage and roar." How secure they are! How free from fear! They are not only as safe as men and nations can make them, they are as safe as God can make them. And that means that they are infinitely safe. They are perfectly secure. Therefore, they have a right to rejoice in their security with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Now, I am afraid that we of to-day do not have the glad sense of safety that belonged to many of the saints of old. How that sense of security sings its way through the Psalms! "The Lord of Hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge; therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea." "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want . . . though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me." "He that dwelleth in the secret place

of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust. Surely He will deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the deadly pestilence."

This sense of security becomes, if possible, even more joyous in the New Testament. "At my first defense no one took my part, but all forsook me: may it not be laid to their account. But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me; that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered ou of the mouth of the lion. The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me unto His Heavenly Kingdom." How secure was Paul in spite of his imprisonment! And Jude shouts, "Now unto Him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy." These early saints had a beautiful sense of safety under the sheltering wing of their Lord.

That same confidence is found in many of our choicest hymns:

"A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing,
Our helper He amidst the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing."

"The soul that on Jesus still leans for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes:
That soul, though all hell should endeavor
to shake.
I'll never, no never, no never forsake."

III

This keeping that God offers is from every kind of evil. We are to be kept from everything that would mar our lives. This does not mean exemption from conflict. It does not mean that we shall never be tested, that we shall never be tried. It does not mean that there will be no battles to be fought. It does not mean that there will be no fiery furnace along the way. But it does mean that when we come to the fiery furnace, He will either keep us from it or keep us in the midst of its horrors. That everywhere we shall be kept, not from trials, I repeat, but from the one enemy Sin. "He is able to save unto the uttermost"; and that does not mean simply from the penalty of sin, but from the deep damnation of its power.

Then He is able to keep us in all conditions and in all circumstances. He is able to keep us in times of hardship and poverty, when we are having a hard fight to keep the wolf from the door. He is also able to keep us in the more trying days of prosperity, when everything we touch seems to turn to gold. He can keep us when we are in the full vigor of health and when the roses bloom upon our cheeks and we feel that sickness is impossible. Then He can keep us when the roses have faded and when pain is walking with fire-shod feet along every nerve of our tortured bodies. He can keep us when we are slandered and shamed and misunderstood and disgraced. He can also keep us when we are honored and flattered and our pathway is strewn with flowers.

Then He can keep us at all seasons. He can keep us in the days of our youth when life's young blood flows hot in our veins. He is able to keep us in the stern stress of life's middle passage when the poetry of life has in some measure changed to prose; when we are too far from the morning to be romantic, and too far from the eventide to be softened and humbled by the thought of our going home. Then He can keep us when our strength has failed, and when our right hand has lost its cunning, and when we are so old and bent and weak that we need a strong arm upon which to lean.

"E'en down to old age all my people shall prove
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;
And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs they shall still in my bosom be borne."

IV

And see how these are kept. They are kept through faith. Now that is not an arbitrary condition. It is no more arbitrary than to say that the blinds must be lifted before your room can be flooded with sunlight. It is no more arbitrary than to say that your eyes must be opened before you can look upon the world's beauties. Faith is the hand that takes hold on God. It is that by which we appropriate. It is that power that opens the windows of our soul out toward the heavenly Jerusalem so that we may be illuminated by the light that flashes from the very face of God. Without faith it is not only impossible

to please God, but it is impossible to make our own the blessings that God longs to bestow upon us.

It need not make us wonder that faith is the condition of our being kept by the power of God. Faith conditions the ordinary affairs of our lives. Without faith it would be impossible to carry on the commerce of the world. Kill faith in the business of this city and it would lapse into utter chaos at once. It is faith that holds our home together. Without faith there would not be a home in the world that would not become a wreck. Faith is essential everywhere. Therefore, we are not to be surprised that it is essential for a right relation with God.

Now this faith by which we are kept is a positive, active something. It is a faith that leads to obedience. It is a faith that recognizes that there are laws that govern the spiritual world just as there are laws that govern the physical. Should I take a notion to swallow some bichloride of mercury or to jump out of the upstairs window, depending on the Lord to keep me, I would not be showing faith in God. I would simply be presuming on God. Or if I were to take a notion to live without eating, or to build up a strong body without exercising, I should still not be showing myself a man of faith, but a man of folly and presumption.

But there are not a few who are guilty of a like folly in the spiritual realm, and they fancy that they are trusting God. For instance, you deliberately and knowingly do things that hurt your religious life. You go places that you know you ought not to go and fancy that the Lord will take care of you. You put your head in the mouth of the lion and pray the Lord not to let him close

down on it. You fancy that God will hear your prayer for forgiveness when you have done wrong when you expect to go and do the same thing the next day. Such an attitude is not fair. The prayer you need to pray is: "Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sin."

And, what is more common still, you leave off your known duty and expect God to keep you. You would think a man very foolish if he expected to be strong physically without food and exercise. But you fancy that you can get on while you neglect the Word of God, while you neglect the place of prayer, while you neglect the services of the sanctuary—even while you leave your church membership a thousand miles away from you. Again I say such conduct is not faith, but the rankest presumption. A faith that is real is a faith that obeys. And God can keep you under no other conditions.

V

What is to be the end of our keeping? The answer to that question is very important. And the answer as given in the text is very beautiful and very gladsome: "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." That is, you are not being kept to be thrown into a little ditch called the grave at the end of the day. You are not invited into this high fellowship with God to rejoice for a little while and then to lose that fellowship forever. You are kept for salvation.

This salvation means, first of all, perfection in character. There is a sense, of course, in which you are saved the moment you trust in Jesus. If the vilest man in this

world were to come to this church this morning and here and now believe on Jesus Christ, God would forgive him and make him whiter than snow. He would be saved. But he would be only an infant. He would be a babe in Christ. He would be far from full-grown manhood. He would be far from perfection. But the salvation of the text means complete salvation. God is keeping us for that good day when we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Then He is keeping us not only for perfection in character, but for perfection in environment. He is keeping us for the inheritance that He has reserved in heaven for us. If I should go back to the home of my boyhood this morning I would find it the loneliest spot in all the world. This would be the case not because of any great physical changes that have taken place there. The old house still stands. The sturdy trees still fold their arms about it. The sentinel hills still lift their tall heads in the back yard. The prattling spring is as refreshing as ever, and the Buffalo River sings the same silvery song. Yet, I repeat, it would be fearfully lonely. Why? Because nobody lives there any more. It is no longer "kept."

But there is a home that is being kept. That is that winsome home up yonder. It is being kept for you. It is being kept for me. We are being kept for that home. One day our Lord is going to bring the kept soul and the kept place together, and that will be heaven. Therefore, we may well shout with Peter: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again into a

lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

VIII

A PILGRIM'S PROGRESS—THE MAN BORN BLIND

John 9: 39

"And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind."

How strange that He who is the Light of the world should bring light to some and darkness to others. Some men's eyes He opens and some He smites with utter blindness. This startling truth is strikingly illustrated by the story recorded in this chapter of which our text is a part. The same heavenly winds blew upon both the seeing and the blind. But the set of the sails of the soul was different. Therefore, one went toward the dark while the other went toward the light. The Pharisees definitely set their faces toward spiritual blindness, while the blind man began a veritable pilgrim's progress toward clear-eyed certainty.

I

Let us look at this blind man before he sets out upon his journey. We have three views of him.

1. As seen by his neighbors. What did they see in him? Listen: "Is not this he that sat and begged?" That is the answer. He was a human parasite, an incarnate uselessness, a living handicap. He sat and begged. That is all. Did he ever dream? Did he ever pray? Did he ever long for the heights? Did he ever weep in secret? No, not so far as his neighbors knew. He only sat and begged. He was a beggar and nothing more.

2. As seen by the disciples. What did these friends of Jesus see in him? Hear their question: "Who did sin, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" They did not ask how he was to be cured, how he might be changed from a liability to an asset. They evidently had no hope for him. The only place he held in their scheme of things was to serve as a starting point for a theological discussion. He was only a specimen. He was merely Exhibit A. They were ready to hold an autopsy, not with any idea of restoring life, but only to discover the cause of death.

3. As seen by Jesus. "As Jesus passed by He saw a man." He saw a creature made in the image of God. He saw one possessed of most amazing possibilities. He saw one capable of the finest courage and the most beautiful loyalty. He saw a being worth going to Calvary to redeem. He saw one who had suffered, but whose suffering was not born of sin, but permitted of God for the enrichment of the sufferer. His loss was to become his gain. His handicap was to become his help. His darkness was to become, through the riches of grace, a gateway to the everlasting dawn.

II

How did this man come to begin his spiritual journey?

The first move was made by Jesus. That is always the case. We are always sought before we begin to seek. We are always pursued before we begin to pursue. The first step toward recovery is always taken by the Shepherd, rather than by the sheep that is gone astray. In a thousand ways our Lord is constantly seeking us. That heart hunger that is yours, that feeling of restlessness, that sense of condemnation; that undefined want, that conviction that life was made for higher uses than that to which you are putting it; all these are but indications that the Good Shepherd is out after the sheep that is lost.

Christ saw the possibilities in this man. He mixed some clay with spittle and anointed his eyes and told him to go to a certain pool and wash. It strikes us as a rather strange procedure. There are other cases of healing of blind men on the part of Jesus. But no two of them did He heal alike. To one he merely spoke, to another he gave a touch. To this man, after plastering his eyes with clay, He gave something definite to do. But while the method was different, the goal was always the same. They all came into the light. They all found the dawn. That is the essential thing. How foolish to argue over the method if we really attain the goal.

Now as to why Jesus used the method here employed, we are not told. Certainly there was no saving power in the mixture of clay and spittle. No doubt the Master saw that this man needed to do something. He needed some-

thing outward and tangible to assist his faith. Christ, therefore, was simply fitting His method to the needs of the man. And, be it said to the honor of the patient, he readily responded. In obedience to the command of Jesus, he went pegging his way toward the pool. He did not wait to have everything explained. He did not ask concerning the value of the clay or of the spittle or of the pool. He simply did as he was commanded. That required both faith and courage.

I encounter this man a few blocks down the street. I look at him in amazement. "What is the matter with your eyes?" I ask. "They are daubed with clay," he replies. "That is queer. What is that for?" "It is to help cure me. I am going down to this pool and wash it off and when that is done I am going to see." Hearing this, I laugh aloud. "Who told you to do that?" "A man named Jesus." "Who is he?" "I do not know." "How does he expect that to cure you?" "I do not know." "Then you are a fool for going," I tell him frankly. "No," he replies, "I should be a fool for not going. I may be cured. But even if the effort ends in failure I shall certainly not be any more blind than I am now." This leaves me speechless. He continues his journey. washes in the pool, and the dawn bursts upon him.

III

The next stage of the journey is in the face of bitter opposition at the hands of those who see. But always the healed man is strictly loyal to all the light he has. He

never claims to know more than the facts in the case guarantee. But never once does he allow what he does not know to make him disloyal to what he does know. He is true to his oracle and is ready to stand by the truth as he understands it at all cost.

It was inevitable that his story should spread abroad. His neighbors could hardly believe that he was the one-time beggar. But, as he affirms that he was, they hurried him before their religious leaders, the Pharisees, to see what they would make out of the case. Here the seeing and the man born blind are brought into sharp contrast. For the one, the day grows brighter, while, for the others, the sun begins to set. Why was this the case?

It was not because the Pharisees questioned the validity of this miracle. That they had a perfect right to do. It was not that they set out to investigate it. That was not only their privilege, but their solemn obligation. Christianity is the furthest possible from being a religion of credulity. It never asks us to throw dust in the eyes of reason or to stultify our common sense. It invites investigation. It is the religion of the open eye and the open mind.

What, then, was wrong with the investigation conducted by the Pharisee? It was not honest. They were not set on finding the truth and following it whatever it might cost. They reached their conclusion before the investigation began. "For the Jews had agreed already that if any man did confess that He was the Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue." They were out to prove false what they desired to be false regardless of what facts in the case might indicate. And it is surely

sober truth to say that no man ever takes a more dangerous and damning course than that.

First, they heard the healed man tell his own straightforward story. They could pick no flaws in it. Then they asked him his opinion of Him who had cured him. He gives it: "He is a prophet." So far they realize they have made no progress.

Next they question his story by claiming that he has never been blind. His parents are called to the witness stand. "Is this your son?" "Yes." "Was he born blind?" "Yes." "How then does he now see?" But they are afraid. They do not possess the same high courage as their son. They have not had his experience. Therefore, they dodge the issue. "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind. But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not; he is of age; ask him; he shall speak for himself." And speak he did, and in no uncertain fashion, for even the Pharisees are convinced, bitterly against their will.

But what effect does this conviction have? Do they accept Jesus? Not at all. They rather call the healed man and give this absurd order: "Give God the praise: We know that this man is a sinner." By this time the once blind man sees through them and is only laughing at them. "Whether he is a sinner I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." "You may know more theology than I," he seems to say, "but I have more experience than you."

Then comes their final effort. They ask him to tell his story once more. But he sees that they are not seeking the

truth. They are merely seeking some way to discredit what they know to be true. Therefore, he answers them with fine sarcasm: "Why would you hear it again? Are you really seeking the light? Do you want to know the truth in order to obey it?" They have no answer to these questions other than abuse and excommunication. But this brave champion of Jesus fires one last parting shot. "If this man were not of God he could do nothing. This I know. This also you know, hard as you try to shut your eyes to the facts."

IV

The final stage marks the healed man's arrival. He reaches not a final goal beyond which there is no further progress. He reaches spiritual certainty beyond which there is endless progress.

Look at the story. He can now see, but he has been excommunicated. He has become an outcast. Therefore, in the eyes of the world he is but little better off than he was before Jesus healed him. He has had to suffer because of his sturdy stand for what he knows to be true. Jesus learns of his excommunication, and sets out to find him. He appreciates his fine loyalty. He yearns to have him as His friend, to enroll him as a citizen of His Kingdom. By and by this seeking Savior and His staunch defender face each other. Jesus then asks him this big question: "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"

And what a superb answer he makes! He does not say, "Yes, I believe. He is too downright honest for that. He is too absolutely sincere. What he knows he will stand by. What he knows he will die by, if need be.

But he will not lay claim to a faith that he does not possess. Hear his answer: "Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him?" He makes no conditions, no reservations. He does not say, "I will believe if there is no cross involved." He declares rather that he is ready to believe regardless of the cost. "Show me the light and I pledge myself to walk in the light wherever it may lead, and whatever it may involve."

Now it is to such a soul that Christ can reveal Himself. Therefore, this is His answer: "Thou hast both seen Him and He it is that talketh with thee." Having heard that, this big and valiant man falls at His feet saying simply: "Lord, I believe." Thus he reached a broad spiritual daylight that was far more thrilling than the dawning of his physical day. And the secret of his arrival was his constant loyalty to the truth as he was given to see it. For it is ever true that, if any man is willing to do His will, he shall know.

But the light that illuminated this one-time beggar only blinded the eyes of the Pharisees. For this gospel is at once our most priceless and our most perilous possession. "It is the savor of life unto life or of death unto death." To refuse to see is to lose our capacity to see. To refuse to hear is to have our ears become stopped. To know the truth and refuse to obey is to become guilty of that sin that hath never forgiveness either in this life or in that which is to come. It was this sin that wrung from the Master that heartbroken cry, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day the things which belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from

thine eyes—And they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the day of thy visitation." Truly for judgment is Jesus come, that the unseeing might see, and that the seeing might be made blind.

IX

THE GLORY OF THE ORDINARY—ANDREW

John 1: 40

"Andrew, Simon Peter's brother."

I

"ANDREW, Simon Peter's brother." The apostle John is afraid that we shall not know who Andrew is. He is afraid that we may get him mixed up with someone else. Therefore, he reminds us that he is Simon Peter's brother. Three times he mentions him in his Gospel and two out of the three he feels called upon to inform us that he was Simon Peter's brother. I dare say that Andrew heard himself thus described so many times that the phrase came to seem almost a part of his name. I have an idea that he heard himself thus described so many times that but for the grace of God in his heart he would have become hot and resentful and gone home in utter indignation.

I have heard Andrew being introduced times without number. The one introducing says, "Mr. Jones, I want you to meet Brother Andrew." Mr. Jones shakes hands in a polite and perfunctory fashion, but he is not really seeing or thinking of Andrew. His friend seeing the

situation then adds this word, "He is Simon Peter's brother." At once interest is alive and alert. "Ah, Simon Peter's brother!" says Mr. Jones. "I have heard of Simon often. He's a wonderful man." And he gives Andrew's hand a hearty grip and an extra shake as he says delightedly, "So you are Simon Peter's brother."

Now it is significant that while Andrew is constantly being introduced as Simon Peter's brother, Simon Peter is never introduced as Andrew's brother. Simon has a reputation of his own. Whatever reputation Andrew has is largely in his brother's name. Therefore, nobody said when introducing Simon, "This is Andrew's brother." In fact, when they learned that colorful and magnetic Simon had a brother so commonplace as Andrew, they were a bit surprised.

To what conclusion then are we driven with regard to Andrew? The whole record indicates this, that he was not nearly so conspicuous nor so gifted as his bluff and hearty brother. Nor was he so gifted as his intimate friends, James and John. He was by no means least among the apostles. There were others more insignificant than he. But even then, we cannot but face the fact that Andrew was only ordinary. He belongs to that crowd to which most of us belong. He is a part of that company that Lincoln said the Lord especially loved, because he made so many of them. He is Andrew, the ordinary.

II

But there is this heartening fact. Jesus has a wonderful welcome for ordinary folks. He has an important

place for them in His ministry. One day John the Baptist saw Jesus pass by. There was nothing to distinguish Him from other men. He wore no halo. But John recognized him and said, "Behold the Lamb of God," and Andrew's heart leaped within him and became eager and expectant. He along with a friend followed Jesus and spent the day with Him, and Andrew became the first outspoken disciple that Jesus won.

Later Jesus found him on the shore of Galilee along with his more gifted brother and their friends and called him, as He called them, to become a fisher of men. For Jesus, I repeat, has a place in His scheme of things for the ordinary. In fact, I do not think he looks upon the conspicuous with anything approximating our wonder and admiration. We are keen for the big and imposing. Had we been making the world it would have been a rather monotonous affair. All our trees would have been giant redwoods. There would have been no poplars nor pines, no peach and apple trees. All our flowers would have been sunflowers or century plants. There would have been no violets, no daisies, no roses. All our birds would have belonged to the ostrich or eagle family, no cardinals, no mockingbirds, no catbirds. We are enthusiastic about the extraordinary. But Jesus has a place for ordinary Andrew among His disciples. And though Andrew leaves all to follow Him, He never makes him into a giant or a genius. He was not a great organizer before his conversion nor did he ever become one. He was not a great leader before, nor was he after. He never became a great preacher. If he ever preached a sermon we do not know it. But he did become extraordinary in his

inner life. He became a man of a marvelously winsome spirit.

1. Andrew became through grace a man of beautiful generosity. It has been said, and with truth, I think, that the position of Andrew was the most difficult of the Apostolic college. Before his conversion and call to the apostleship, he had been intimately associated with three others who became apostles. They were Peter and James and John. He had been partners with these in business. They had possibly grown up together. They had certainly fished together. They battled tempests together. They had faced death together. Now together they have entered the school of Christ.

But here there came a measure of separation. There was an inner circle among the apostles. The three that constituted that inner circle were the three with whom Andrew had been for years most intimately associated.

Andrew himself was not included. He seems to have been overlooked. For instance, one day Jesus goes into a home where a little girl has died. He takes with Him Peter, James and John. Andrew is left out. Another day he goes up into a mountain to pray. There He is transfigured. There certain disciples are privileged to see visitants from the world unseen. They are privileged to hear the voice of God. But Andrew is not a part of that little group. It is composed of Peter, James and John. Andrew is a part of the humiliated and defeated nine that are at the foot of the mountain. Then came that black night in Gethsemane. Jesus has begun to be sorrowful and very heavy. Whom does He select to watch with Him? Here again is Andrew overlooked. He takes in-

stead Peter, James and John. It is a hard place for Andrew, doubly hard since he must see his most intimate associates go forward while he remains behind.

How did Andrew bear up under such treatment? Did he grow bitter with envy, fling out of the door, and go home? No, he did not. If he ever suffered a single pang of envy there is no indication of the fact in the record. The reason he escaped was because he put Christ and His Kingdom first. It was because love so filled his heart that envy was crowded out. There was simply no room for it. "Love envieth not."

"Love took up the harp of life, and smote on all the cords with might,
Smote the cord of self that trembling passed in music out of sight."

2. Andrew was a man who dared to be himself and to do his own work in his own way. Peter was an impressive figure. He had personality. He commanded respect. He was a compelling preacher. But be it said to the credit of Andrew that he never tried to imitate Peter. He never tried to be like him. He believed that the Lord was serious when he sent him into the world. He believed further that if the Lord had wanted another Simon Peter in his family He would have made one. Therefore, he was willing and glad to be Andrew.

Then he was willing to do the work that Andrew could do. There were some things that Simon and James and John could do that he could not. But there were some things that Andrew could do that they could not. Therefore, he did not bury his talent because he saw that it

was smaller than that of his brother or of his friends. He realized that he was not going to be judged for the use he made of Simon's talents. He knew that he was not going to be judged for the use that he made of the talent of James and John. He knew that he was going to be judged for the use that he made of his own. Therefore, he set himself to the doing of his own work with loyal fidelity.

III

What was the outcome?

1. Andrew found life beautifully livable in spite of his rather trying position. In his place a self-centered man would have suffered torture. He would have scorched himself with the hell-fires of envy. He might have become a pathetic wreck in spite of the presence of Jesus. But Andrew made his trying situation minister to his growth in likeness to Christ. Willing to lose his life, he found it in winsome abundance. Refusing to grow resentful because others were more gifted than himself, he came to have positive joy in their greater gifts. Thus in a difficult position where pigmy-souled folks would have become soured and wretched, he found life delightfully full and beautifully opulent.

2. In spite of his lesser gifts his life was magnificently useful. No sooner had he found Jesus himself than he went at once after his own brother Simon. He understood that most difficult of tasks, the Christianizing of his own home. The disciple who can preach effectively at home can preach effectively anywhere. The disciple who wins those of his own household has accom-

plished a task of vastest importance. To Christianize the home is finally to Christianize the nation, it is to Christianize the world. To fail to win the home is to fail everywhere.

It is well to study also the fine tact and common sense that Andrew used in his dealings with Simon. He did not begin by berating him for his swearing. There can be no doubt that Peter was given to this evil habit. The fact that he swore so eloquently after three years in the fellowship of Jesus is a rather positive indication that he was lapsing back into a practice that had been a fixed habit with him for a long time. But Andrew emphasized the positive rather than the negative. With hot enthusiasm and with a conviction that amounted to absolute certainty he declared, "We have found the Messiah." Peter perhaps hesitated, but Andrew laid hold on him and brought him to Jesus.

This first victory on the part of Andrew seems to have so heartened him that he resolved that he would never miss an opportunity of speaking to the individual for his Master. Thus he becomes the patron saint of personal workers. There is no indication that he was a great preacher. But he could do that which is so vastly important, he could speak to people one by one. He was skilled in the kind of preaching that was the greatest power in the remaking of the world at that time. It is the kind of preaching that is most sorely needed to-day. And wonderful to relate, it is the kind of preaching that every follower of Jesus can do with some degree of success, if he is only willing to pay the price.

Andrew comes upon the scene two other times after

this. In both scenes he is still working diligently at his task.

Jesus is out by the seaside. He has gone there with His disciples for a bit of rest. But the people learn about it and break in upon Him. And Jesus, instead of being resentful at the loss of His holiday, gives Himself with glad abandon to ministering to the needy crowds that throng about Him. He teaches and heals, and heals and teaches till the sun hangs low above the western hills. Then He questions Philip about the possibility of feeding the hungry multitude. But Philip has no light at all to throw on the situation.

Meanwhile, Andrew has got into the confidence of a certain lad. Unable to minister in a larger way, he has sought out this boy. He has entered into conversation with him. Andrew has an eye for the great that was hidden in the small. So completely has he won this boy's friendship that he tells Andrew about his lunch, that he has five loaves and two fishes, and that they two will slip away in a little while and have dinner together. Therefore, when Andrew hears the question that Jesus asks Philip, he has a suggestion, which he makes quite timidly: "There is a lad here who has five loaves and two fishes." And at the invitation of Jesus he brings the boy forward, and with the assistance of that lad, Jesus feeds the hungry thousands. And the whole multitude is brought under obligation to Andrew.

Then on Monday of the last week of the life of Jesus, certain Greeks came to Philip with this age-old longing beating in their hearts and speaking through their lips, "Sir, we would see Jesus." But, strange to say, Philip

did not know just what to do with them. He did not know exactly what to say. I wonder if we should be any wiser. If one were to come to you with that question, what would you say? Philip was at a loss. In his perplexity he turned to another of the disciples. To whom did he turn? He did not turn to bold and aggressive Simon. He did not turn to the Sons of Thunder. He turned to Andrew. He knew all the apostles intimately and knowing them all he selected Andrew as the one who would be most interested. He selected him as the wisest guide in the delicate matter that he had in hand.

And when Andrew heard the story he knew what to do. He at once told Jesus about it. And I feel somehow that he brought these Greeks personally and gave them an introduction to his Master. Anyway, Jesus was greatly pleased. He heard in the good news that Andrew brought the deepest heart-cry of all the oncoming centuries. He saw in these Greeks whose longings Andrew was voicing the vanguard of a vast army that no man could number. He saw in them a prophecy of conquest that should go on increasing till the kingdoms of the world should become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ.

Who among the apostles of Jesus rendered the largest service? Whose life was the most useful? It is impossible to say. Since Andrew won Peter, to say nothing of the others he won, and since he had a part in all that Peter became and all that he did, it is possible that none was more useful than Andrew. Certain it is that, when the books are opened, it is going to be found that many who were but obscure and ordinary rendered most abiding service. Many that were first are going to be last, and

many that were last are going to be first. We owe much to the gifted sons of genius. We owe more to the ordinary men and women who have filled their humble places faithfully and loyally, in the fear of God.

"Common as the wayside grasses,
Ordinary as the soil,
By the score he daily passes,
Going to and from his toil.
Stranger he to wealth or fame,
He is only What's-his-name.

"Not for him the glittering glory,
Not for him the places high,
Week by week the same old story
Try and fail and fail and try.
All his days seem dull and tame,
Poor old plodding What's-his-name.

"Though to someone else the guerdon,
Though but few his worth may know.
On his shoulders rests the burden
Of our progress won so slow.
Red the road by which we came
With the blood of What's-his-name."

X

A FIGHTER—ZACCHAEUS

Luke 19: 5

"Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house."

IF EVER a reception committee had its plans knocked awry it must have been that committee that was to welcome Jesus to Jericho. Jesus came into Jericho on a wave of popularity. No doubt there were some of the best people in the city who had consented to serve on that committee. Jesus at this time was the best known man among the Jewish people. He was the best loved and by far the best hated. But He was in the limelight. So high and low were deeply interested and many were ready to do Him honor.

Now just what this reception committee had planned for the Young Prophet we are not told. It may be that one of the oldest families in the city had agreed to entertain Him. But whatever they had planned, of this we may be absolutely sure, they never dreamed that their distinguished Visitor would become a guest of Zacchaeus. The last place that they expected Him to be entertained was in the home of this rich, grafting renegade.

That a decent Jewish rabbi should go to such a place was simply incredible.

But that is exactly what happened. When they heard Jesus invite Himself to be the guest of Zacchaeus they were both shocked and indignant. When they saw those two men walking down the narrow street arm in arm toward the home of Zacchaeus they were utterly outraged. Everybody said that it was a foolish thing for Jesus to do. By such conduct he could not but dig a chasm between Himself and the best people of the city. By such conduct He could not but alienate from Him all those whose standing in the community could further His cause. Everybody realized that such a course as His could win the approval of none save a few outcasts and social nobodies that did not amount to anything anyway.

But not even the Pharisees, I am sure, were more amazed at the turn that affairs had taken than Zacchaeus himself. Little did he dream, when he closed up his toll-booth that day, and set out to take a look at Jesus that he was not only going to see Him, but was actually going to have Him as his guest. He would not have dared to dream so bold a dream. Nor would he have ventured to make a request so daring. For it had not occurred to him that this amazing Visitor was coming to Jericho especially to find him and to enroll him in His Kingdom. Nobody expected Zacchaeus to become a Christian. I do not think that at first Zacchaeus himself expected to do so. He may have thought of it dimly and yearningly. But he probably put those thoughts from him as impossible of realization. For he was in a bad way.

He was confronted by obstacles that seemed to make his becoming a follower of Jesus Christ all but unthinkable.

I

What were some of his difficulties?

1. Zacchaeus was a publican. That means that he was a tax-gatherer. He wore the livery of the Roman Empire. He helped a foreign conquerer to prey upon his own conquered nation. He was in a real sense a traitor to his country. If he were like most of his class, he was not only a traitor, but a grasping and greedy plunderer. He was one who plied the trade of a robber without the necessity of incurring the robber's risk. He was securely sheltered behind Rome. Therefore, his sordid trade did not even possess the doubtful glamour that belongs to that of the knight of the highway.

Being a publican, he was naturally hated. No decent man would cross his threshold. No decent man would ever have him as a guest in his home. He was a social outcast. He was a man without reputation. Everybody thought the worst possible about him. Everybody expected the worst possible of him. And you are aware that nobody goes wrong quite so easily as the man that everybody expects to go wrong. Confidence is a bracing something. To be believed in is to be greatly strengthened and fortified. To have nobody believe anything of us but evil is to find evil next to inevitable.

2. Then Zacchaeus had a passion for money. He loved money better than he loved his nation. He loved money better than he loved the respect of his fellows. He

loved money better than he loved his own soul. He loved money better than he loved his God. That is the reason he became a publican. There was but one master passion that could compel a man to work at his despised trade, and that was a passion for money.

Not only did Zacchaeus love money, but he had won it. He was rich. That made his situation, if possible, more difficult. Not that money is an evil in itself. It is not. It does good or harm according to the one who possesses it. It is like keenness of intellect. It is like great ability in any direction. Its moral quality depends upon the moral qualities of him to whom it belongs. Genius if rightly used may be a blessing. If wrongly used, it may be a curse. It is the same with money. In the hands of one who is not its slave it may be vastly useful. But if it becomes master, it leads to destruction.

"How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God." This is true for a number of reasons. Riches tend to absorb our attention. They fix our minds upon themselves. They also give us a sham security. They often afford a sense of independence that is false and unreal. No doubt Zacchaeus made up his mind, when he decided to become a publican, that if he only got money, such things as honor and decency and respectability, and even self-respect, would not matter. "Why do you want to be worth a million dollars?" a growing business man was asked in a modern story. "So I can tell the other fellow to go to the devil," was the heartless answer. That is, "so I can be independent, so I can do as I please and snap my finger in the face of the world." So Zacchaeus proposed to do, and that

made his conversion very doubtful. For it is easier to save a man from the love of drink than from the love of money. The drunkard knows that he is wrong. But the money slave tends to think that he is the only really wise man in the community.

3. Finally, Zacchaeus was lost. So Jesus emphatically teaches. And being lost, mark you, is not a mere abstraction. Jesus regards certain men as lost. Here is a concrete example. Zacchaeus was a lost man. He was lost to God. God no longer had the joy of his love and his confidence and his service. Zacchaeus was lost to himself. His inner peace, his inner joy, his self-respect, these were gone. He was lost to the world. God had a beautiful plan for his life. It was a plan that, if carried out, would have made life for all who knew him gladder and better. It would have boosted the whole world up-hill a little. But Zacchaeus missed all this because he was lost.

II

But the fact that Zacchaeus was lost does not mean that there was no good in him. He was made in the image of God. That image was marred. Still he was not wholly bad. No man ever is. In spite of his evil reputation, in spite of his slavery to money, in spite of his lostness, there were yet some beautiful qualities in him. Qualities that were destined to serve as doorways for his entering into the Kingdom of God.

1. Zacchaeus was curious. When he heard that Jesus was coming to his city, he resolved to see Him. There had been rumors about Him. Those rumors had been very

pleasing to Zacchaeus. For instance, he had heard that Jesus was not so hard on his class as all decent folks expected Him to be. He had heard, too, of His scathing rebukes of his old enemies, the Pharisees. He was naturally curious to see this Young Prophet who was courageous enough to rebuke the religious leaders of the day and at the same time say a good word for the underdog.

Now I have actually heard certain mistaken people ridicule others because they were curious. But curiosity is not in itself bad. Of course, it is like certain other good things in that it may be wrongly used. Many a young fellow has taken his first wrong step out of curiosity. Many a young girl has soiled the white flower of her innocence for the same reason. We want to see behind the scenes. We want to know from experience. We want to feel the thrill of the forbidden. In all probability, the predominant motive in Eve's sin was curiosity. Certainly millions have gone wrong since then for that reason.

But there are larger and finer uses of curiosity. All discoveries have been made by the curious. Curiosity is the name of the telescope through which the astronomer has studied the heavens. Curiosity is the microscope by which the scientist has made his discoveries in the laboratory. Curiosity may be the pathway that leads to the discovery of God. Many a man has gone to church out of curiosity and has remained to pray. Blessed is the man who is curious to see Jesus. Had Zacchaeus not been curious, he might have hung over his ledgers and kept his eyes glued on a column of figures and remained

dead to the presence of Jesus Christ. Millions of incurious people are doing that at this very moment.

2. Zacchaeus was more than curious. He was restless and disappointed and thirsty for God. He had set out to get money and had succeeded. But he had found that money had no power to satisfy the longings of the soul or to heal the hurts of the heart. He was possibly wondering if this Jesus might not do something for him. He had heard that a one-time publican like himself was now among His intimate friends. That was hopeful. Maybe He might do something for another outcast. Anyway, before he despaired utterly he would make an effort to see Him. As he turned from his place of business that day he might have said truly, "As the hart panteth after the waterbrook, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God."

3. Then Zacchaeus was a man of courage. He was a born fighter. When he locked up his toll-booth that day and set out to see Jesus, he meant business. He knew he was going to find himself in a hostile crowd. But the situation was probably even more difficult than he had expected. Everybody seemed to be in that narrow street. And Jesus was in the very center of the crowd. Therefore, Zacchaeus, being short of stature, could not get a glimpse of Him. The unfriendly crowd doubtless enjoyed his disappointment. They hustled him here and there and laughed at his failure.

At last the little fellow leaves off his efforts and takes to his heels. "Ha ha," they shout after him. "I knew you would not last long." And it does seem that Zacchaeus is whipped. He is running away at the top of his speed. But this is not the flight of a coward. It is the flight

of a hero. It is not the running of a man who is whipped. It is the running of a man that has just begun to fight.

What is he going to do next? He has made an honest effort to see Jesus and has failed. What would you do? What did you do? Did you saunter back to your toll-booth and give over the fight? "Are you a Christian?" I ask. "No." "Why not?" "I tried once and failed; therefore, I quit." So Zacchaeus might have done. But that type of cowardice brings failure in every enterprise of life. No man can hope to succeed, however small the task, who quits after one failure. Zacchaeus tried again. He did not count the game lost because he had failed to win the first inning. If he should not see Jesus in one way, he would see Him in another. There is a bit of boyishness left in this man in spite of the fact that he is chief among the publicans. He runs ahead and climbs up into a sycamore tree. It was rather an undignified performance for a state official. But Zacchaeus is not out after dignity. He is out for something far bigger and far better. He is out to see Jesus.

III

What was the outcome? Did this courageous man with his hungry heart have his pains all for nothing? No. No earnest seeker after Jesus ever does. Look at the story.

"When Jesus was come to the place." Then Jesus did come. He is always coming to the place where there is a lost man. That is the reason he came to this world. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was

lost." That is the reason He is in this city. That is the reason He is in this church. That is the reason He is at your side at this moment. He is in search of the lost. No power in heaven or hell can keep the seeking Saviour and the seeking sinner apart. He came to the place. He comes to your place and to mine. He knows where we are. He is here even now, "closer than breathing and nearer than hands and feet." And mark you he is here, not seeking the righteous, but sinners.

"Jesus looked up and saw him." A Christ bent on respectability would have looked straight ahead. He would not have endangered His cause nor spotted His reputation by even glancing at Zacchaeus. But Jesus saw him. He looked into the heart of him. He read his longings after goodness and after God. He rejoiced over his possibilities. He saw the lost man that he was. He saw the saved man that he might be. Then He called him. He called him by name. He called him as a mother might call the child of her love. "Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house. Zacchaeus, I have journeyed out of the eternities to meet you. I have journeyed out of the eternities to spend my last Sabbath on earth in your home. Make haste and come down."

And when Zacchaeus heard himself thus invited, it broke his heart. Here was One who cared for him in spite of his soiled past. Here was one who was willing to share his shame, to shoulder the burden of his deep disgrace. It was most amazing. It seemed too good to be true. Yet he dared to believe it. That is evidenced by the fact that it stands written, "He made haste and

came down and received Him joyfully." So great was his joy and so overflowing was his gratitude that this one-time money slave said, "Lord, here and now I give half of all I possess to the poor, and if I have unjustly exacted money from any man, I pledge myself to restore him fourfold."

What has happened to Zacchaeus? The most wonderful something imaginable. He has been saved by receiving Jesus. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God." The same Christ who had so recently said that he was lost now declares that he is saved." "To-day is salvation come to this house." It is altogether beautiful. The Christ of God actually went home with Zacchaeus that day. He sat down at his table with him, and they talked as friend with friend. And Jesus was the first decent man that had been in his home for nobody knows how many years. Then the fact that he took Jesus home with him means that his wife got a chance at Jesus. It means that his children got a chance at Him. Jesus abode with Zacchaeus in Jericho for a little while. Then Zacchaeus slipped away to abide with Jesus through all eternity.

XI

A WOMAN'S REVENGE—JOHN THE BAPTIST

Matthew 14: 8

"And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John the Baptist's head in a charger."

THIS is a horrible scene. A slave enters the banqueting hall with a dish in his bloody hands. This dish has been prepared at the especial request of a young girl. She has won it by her skill in dancing. But it is not such a dish as you would expect a girl of little more than high-school age to order. It does not contain some dainty viand to coax a lagging appetite. On the contrary, it contains the head of a man. It has been just recently severed from his body. The lips stand apart. The pallor of the cheeks is emphasized by the dark background of blood. But when this ghastly platter is set before her, Salome looks at it without a shudder; for she is possessed of a poise and heartlessness worthy of one far older in cruelty and crime than herself.

Then she takes the dish in her dainty white hands and hurries to her mother, for it is not for herself that she has asked this ghastly gift. It is for Herodias. As the mother sees her approaching, her languor falls from

her. Her cheeks burn redder under their coat of rouge. Her hard eyes take on a bright glitter. She seizes the dish with eager hands, glares gloatingly into the sightless eyes that stare at nothing. Then she laughs a little metallic laugh and says, "Ah, yes, I got you, just as I swore I would." It is indeed a terrible scene. One to jar the faith and make the blood run cold.

I

Who is this hideous and cruel woman? Her name is Herodias. She is the wife of one Philip who lives in Rome. She and her husband once had the pleasure of entertaining Herod, the brother of Philip and the uncle of herself. During this visit, Herod and Herodias became infatuated with each other. I suppose each discovered that the other was his or her affinity. Be that as it may, Herod asked Herodias to elope with him. She consented, provided he would send his present wife back to her father. To this Herod agreed, and he carried out his agreement, though it cost him a war a little later. Herodias also kept her promise, fled from Rome, and joined her paramour. As the story opens, we find the two living together in open and notorious adultery.

And who was this man at whose head Herodias is gazing with such hideous satisfaction? Was this the man who years ago taught her to take her first downward steps? Was he some villain that had soiled the white flower of her girlish innocence? No, he was John the Baptist. He was a prophet of the Lord. He was a preacher of righteousness. He was a man of such moral

worth that Jesus Christ spoke of him in the highest terms, saying that a greater had not been born of woman.

What a contrast between these two! Herodias represents woman at her wicked worst. And woman at her worst is about the most diabolical something in the world. John represents manhood of a fine and clean and noble order. He is truly admirable and truly great. It is thoroughly startling, therefore, to see this triumph of wrong over right. Here is a man who was loyal to the highest when loyalty was costly. And what was the outcome? He wins no outward victory. On the contrary, he meets with utter failure. The end of his rugged loyalty is that his head becomes the plaything of a ruthless harlot.

II

How did this come about? How did Herodias come to array herself against John?

Here is the story. John was a child of promise. The record says that he was filled with the Holy Spirit from his birth. He lived a solitary life. Dwelling in the great open spaces, and brooding over the problems of life and destiny, John came into possession of certain great convictions. He came to be possessed of some first-hand knowledge of the eternal God. He came to be possessed of certain firm convictions concerning the Lamb of God who was to take away the sin of the world.

Under the spell of these mighty convictions, he began to preach out in the wilderness. Soon the solitudes of the wilderness were echoing to the tread of vast mul-

titudes. There came to him soldiers and traders, ploughmen and vinedressers, scholarly aristocrats and men without learning, holy women and women who were outcasts. And this sturdy man preached to them the gospel of repentance. And many confessed their sins and received baptism at his hands. So great became his fame that he was invited to preach at the court of Herod.

Now this marked an epoch in the life of John. John's friends possibly gave him some good advice when they learned that he was going to preach to Herod. They spoke to him after this fashion: "It was all right for you to use great plainness of speech down by the Jordan, but you'd better put on the soft pedal up at the court of the Tetrarch. Be sure that you do not get personal in your preaching. And above all else steer clear of the seventh commandment, for you know that Herod is living with his brother Philip's wife, and if you mention that there is sure to be trouble.

But John did not heed this prudent advice. The seventh commandment seems to have been his first text. John's dealing with Herod shows his true greatness. It shows his high courage, his passion for righteousness, his fine forgetfulness of himself. For it was not easy for John to rebuke Herod. We realize this when we face the following facts.

1. Herod was a man of prominence. He was a man of position and of power. He was one whose friendship would be very helpful. He was one whose opposition might mean death.

2. Then Herod was inclined to be friendly. He heard John gladly and did many things. There were days, no

doubt, when John believed that he might succeed in winning this man. Certainly Herod was inclined to be tolerant toward him. That in itself made John's position the more difficult. It is easier to rebuke one that is openly antagonistic than to rebuke one who is inclined to be your friend and to listen to your message.

3. The courage of this rebuke is further seen in that it was personal. It does not take any great courage to rebuke a whole congregation. I have heard a certain type of preacher spend a full hour at it. Then I have heard those of his hearers who felt that he was talking about somebody else, commend him for his courage. But such preaching does not, as a rule, require any courage at all. If one calls such a preacher to task, all he has to do is to say "I did not mean you." But to rebuke a man to his face, when he is a man of power and position, that requires courage of the very highest order.

4. Then John's greatness is seen in the method of his rebuke. He does not begin with apologies. He does not tell Herod how painful it is for him to have to say what he is saying. John is not thinking of himself. He is thinking of Herod. Therefore, he goes directly to the point. Without any excuse-making, without any fawning, without any whining, he says, "It is not lawful for thee to have her."

5. Finally, his rebuke shows a passion for righteousness and a longing for Herod's salvation. He did not base his appeal on expediency. He did not tell Herod that the Jews were outraged at his conduct. He did not tell him how much more popular he would be if he would send Herodias back to her husband. He based his re-

buke on the fundamental bed-rock principle of right and wrong. He said, "It is not lawful for thee to have her. You ought to send her back because it is the only right way out of a wrong and sinful alliance."

III

What was the outcome of this courageous sermon?

Let us face the fact at once that the results were very disappointing. Nobody came forward to seek the Lord. Not a hand was raised to request prayer. Nobody was melted to tears. It is true that Herod was frightened. Strange terrors gripped his soiled soul as he listened to the preacher, but he did not repent. Nor was the influence on Herodias any better. In fact, it was far worse. As she listened to the sermon, and saw the terror that looked out from Herod's eyes, she began to fear that her weak paramour might yield to the appeal of the preacher and send her back home. Therefore, hot anger was stirred within her. Not that she blazed with indignation against her sin, but against him who rebuked it. She resolved then and there to wreak her vengeance on this loyal and courageous preacher.

Her first move toward gaining this end was to induce Herod to put John in prison. That was a heavy stroke for John. That was a calamity that to this man of the wide-open spaces was almost worse than death. In the gloom of his prison cell it was hard for him to keep up his faith. In fact, it was so hard that he found it utterly impossible. He had stood for Christ with all the loyalty of his soul, and now Christ had come bringing in

His hands power beyond the human. Yet this Christ left him to languish in prison. Therefore, doubt got the better of him and put out for a time every star in his sky and caused him to sob out this pathetic question: "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?"

Not only did Herodias rob John of his liberty, she robbed him of his life. This she would have done at the very moment of his rebuke, but Herod was afraid to carry out her wishes, so she had to bide her time. But at last her opportunity came. Herod is having a birthday banquet. Boon companions are present, and they are celebrating in that fashion that some to-day fancy so witty and brilliant; they are getting drunk. When Herodias sees that they are drunk enough to be thoroughly foolish, she sends her fair daughter, Salome, to entertain them with a dance. The appeal of this dance is to the most bestial and vulgar. Naturally Herod and his guests are delighted. In fact, Herod is so enthusiastic that he promises the dancer anything that she will ask, even to the half of his kingdom.

Now Salome knows what she is about. She has been carefully instructed by her mother. Nor am I disposed greatly to blame the girl. She has been cursed in the most dangerous and deadly fashion, by having a heartless and ambitious adventuress for a mother. Nobody can so help us and bless us as a mother, if she is a good woman; and nobody can so effectively blight and damn and destroy, if she is worldly and wicked. Herodias did not hesitate to expose her young daughter to the gaze of filthy and lustful men in order to gain her ends.

For what present does this young girl ask? Flowers

maybe, the rarest blossoms that can be grown in the royal gardens. No, she does not ask for flowers. Maybe she asks for some priceless jewel. She has it in her power to ask for diamonds that sparkle like condensed sunlight. But she makes no such request. She says rather, "Give me here the head of John the Baptist in a dish." The request half sobers Herod. I think his face must have grown a bit pale. He is afraid and genuinely sorry.

But in spite of his sorrow, he has to yield: "Nevertheless, for his oath's sake and for the sake of them that sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her." I do not think the oath counted for much. The decisive factor was the crowd. He could not resist the pressure of his boon companions. How many have gone wrong not because they were swept off their feet by an uncontrollable passion, but for lack of courage to stand against the crowd. Truly, "The fear of man bringeth a snare," and, "The companion of fools shall be destroyed." Herod yielded, and the ghastly deed was done. A few minutes later Herodias is glaring with cynical and cruel eyes at the face of the prophet who had dared to rebuke her.

IV

The ending is thoroughly disappointing. Frankly, we do not like it. We like to see a slave boy, Joseph, stand by his convictions and pass to a palace on the Nile. We like to see an exiled youth named Daniel purpose in his heart to keep clean, and then become the biggest man in Babylon. We like to see the Hebrew children pass into the fiery furnace out of loyalty to conscience, only to

come out without the smell of fire on their garments. We love to see justice meted out here and now. We frankly do not like stories where right is forever on the scaffold and wrong forever on the throne, even if there are those who claim that the scaffold sways the future. But in spite of our desire in the matter, when we face the facts, we realize that every Joseph does not reach a palace, that every Daniel does not come into a place of power, and that sometimes the Hebrew children are burned to ashes. Therefore, there are at least three solid and helpful lessons that God would teach us through this disappointing story of John the Baptist.

1. Right living does not always bring outward success. Scoundrels get rich and live on Fifth Avenue while good men go to the wall. Self-centered parasites live in luxury and die in palaces while self-denying heroes sometimes die in neglect and poverty. A sportsman died some time ago, the account of whose death filled many columns in the daily papers. That very same week a scientist died who had given his life to the stamping out of pellagra and other deadly diseases, and he received only a few lines on the back page. God does not seem to be concerned so much with our making a living as with our making a life. He is not so much concerned to have us creatures of comfort as to have us creatures of character.

2. The second fact that we may learn from this disappointing story is that, while John failed in the eyes of the world, it is on the feet of such failures that humanity makes most of its progress out of darkness into light. By far the greater part of the upward urge that

has blessed our world has come through the sacrifices of those who have dared to fail in a righteous cause. Was ever a failure more tragic than that on Calvary? Here One is dying, seemingly rejected both by God and man. "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" But out of this utter failure our world has been reborn. And we may be sure that no reverse suffered out of loyalty to God and conscience is ever suffered in vain.

3. The third lesson we learn is this. It is not our business in life to demand certain visible results. It is not our business to win applause. It is not our business to win wealth. It is not our business to achieve success, though it is our business to deserve to succeed. It is our business to follow the right as God gives us to see the right, to speak the truth as God gives us to understand the truth. It is not my business to compel one among you to repent. Not even God can do that. It is my business to deliver my message in the fear of God, then leave the results with Him.

It is said that years ago during a storm off Cape Hatteras, a ship caught in the tempest was being torn to pieces. The captain of the life-saving crew ordered the boat to be launched that they might go to the rescue. One of the crew ran to the captain and said: "It is useless to go. The wind is seaward. We can get out to the wreck, but we can never get back." And the captain answered simply: "It is not necessary to get back. It is necessary to go." And so it is for you and me. It is not necessary to win the world's crowns. But it is necessary for us to do right as God gives us to see the right in utter scorn of the consequences.

XII

A BEAUTIFUL VOCATION—ONESIPHORUS

II Timothy 1: 16

"He oft refreshed me."

THE Roman legionary pacing back and forth before Paul's cell paused to glance in at his prisoner. He cannot withhold a kindly interest for this strange preacher he has been set to guard. "The old gentleman does not seem so well to-day," he says to himself. "He is usually a most cheerful soul. Again and again I have heard the lilt of his song in the night. He is always urging others to rejoice in the Lord. As a rule he practises what he preaches in this respect, as in all others, but this morning he seems depressed. No wonder, though, with death staring him in the face. Then, too, winter is coming on, and he has no cloak. Besides, that ingrate, Demas, deserted him the other day. That hit him hard. I wish there were something I could do for him, but of course I can do nothing."

Suddenly the guard's gloomy thoughts are broken off by the arrival of a visitor. Ah! it is Onesiphorus. He knows this sunny-faced man. He is immensely glad for the prisoner's sake that he has come. He has visited

Paul before, and always after such visits the prisoner has seemed unusually cheerful. "May I see Brother Paul?" he asks. "Indeed you may. And I think he will be needing you. He seems to have had a bad night." At once he is ushered in, and the two greet each other warmly. The guard withdraws, leaving the friends to themselves. Later when Onesiphorus is gone, he glances again at his prisoner. His face is no longer in his hands. There is a new light in his eyes and a new elasticity in his step. He is even singing softly to himself. "Did you two have a good visit?" the guard inquires. "Excellent," is the reply. "I feel much better. He refreshes me."

What did Onesiphorus say to Paul? We do not know. They may have talked about the weather. They may have discussed the future of the growing young Church. They may have spoken of their own personal experience of the saving grace of Christ. They may have prayed together. But whatever the nature of their conversation, it brought Paul new courage and fresh hope. His coming was like a breath from the shimmering sea. It was like a breeze from the sun-kissed hills. "Thank God for Onesiphorus," he said in his heart. "He was as bread to the hungry. He was as rest for the weary. Seeing him was like kissing a refreshing spring on the lips when one is thirsty. It was like strolling in a flower-garden after being shut up in a musty room."

Now this is not a description of just one single visit on the part of Onesiphorus. It is rather a picture of the kind of visit this man was constantly making. The story here told is a typical page out of this man's biography. "He oft refreshed me," said Paul. You see, he rendered

this high service again and again. When Paul was in the thick of battle over in Ephesus, Onesiphorus brought him into his debt. He refreshed him there. Then in Rome when Paul was in prison and the need was far greater, he still blessed Paul with his bracing and cheering ministry. Just how much Paul's usefulness was increased by the kindly services of this unknown man none but God will ever know.

And what Onesiphorus did for Paul we may be sure he did for many others. He was constantly refreshing people. He worked at it so persistently that it became the habit of his life. How did he earn his living? We are not told. He may have been a man of some means. He may have been a small shopkeeper. He may have been a day-laborer. He may have been a traveling preacher whose preaching was not greatly successful. But whatever he did for a living, it was only a side line with him. His real vocation was being refreshing. He heartened folks. He braced them up. He brought courage to the cheerless and depressed. He had, I take it, the most beautiful vocation in the world. He enabled those who knew him best to say with joyful gratitude, "He oft refreshed me."

II

Now you will doubtless agree with me that in selecting this vocation Onesiphorus made the wisest possible choice. This is evident for the following reasons:

1. His choice was wise because the vocation he chose was the same as that chosen by Jesus Himself. "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I

will give you rest," is the appeal of Jesus. But the word here translated "I will give you rest" is the same as this used to describe the beautiful vocation of Onesiphorus. What Jesus said, therefore, was this, "Come unto Me, all ye who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will refresh you." This was the work of Jesus then. That is His work to-day and forever. He is as rivers of water in a dry place. He is cheer for the cheerless. He is light for those that sit in darkness. He is forever giving Himself to the task of refreshing people. Wise, therefore, is the man who chooses the same high vocation.

2. This was a wise choice because those that refresh us are so greatly needed. I am speaking to some who have not yet made choice of a vocation. You have not yet decided just how you will invest your life. Permit me to offer this suggestion. In making your choice, select one that is necessary to human well-being. Choose your vocation with the idea of serving rather than of being served. If you do that, all purely selfish pursuits are ruled out at once. Nobody needs the gambler. Nobody needs the bootlegger. Nobody needs the business man who is in business for himself alone. How tragic to give one's life to something that the world does not need!

But this vocation is one that the world must have as long as it remains a world. The demand for it is universal. Everybody at one time or another needs to be refreshed. Paul was a staunch man. He was a man of dauntless courage. He was a man of great faith. He was a man of wonderful intimacy with God. He was a man who had refreshed others and had cheered others

throughout a tireless ministry. How refreshing he was on shipboard that day of storm when the courage of every other had failed and when the hope of every other had died. But even great, heroic Paul needed the ministry of Onesiphorus. Giant that he is, he is not above making this grateful entry in this personal letter, "He oft refreshed me."

If Paul needed a visit from one who refreshed, it is not to be wondered at that such a ministry is sometimes needed by ordinary people like ourselves. There are so many who are discouraged. There are so many who are baffled and defeated. There are so many who are finding more of tears than of laughter. There are so many who are lonely. There are so many who are dead tired and ready to faint. No man, therefore, is more greatly needed than one who can change our hopelessness into expectancy, our self-contempt into self-respect. No one renders a larger service than he who puts heart into us, who sends us back to the battle of life with our strength renewed, our faith quickened, and our hearts gladdened with the hope of victory.

3. This choice was wise in the third place because it was one for which Onesiphorus had a God-given aptitude. Happy is the man who finds his place in the scheme of things. There are few things more pitiful than a misfit. Onesiphorus could not have succeeded at every vocation. No more can we. It is absolutely foolish for one to say, "I can do whatever anyone else can do." That is not true. There were a thousand things that Onesiphorus could not do. I have an idea that if he was a preacher, he was not an outstanding success. I am sure he was not

a great scholar. He was not a great poet. He was not a great artist. These vocations were doubtless beyond him as they are beyond most of us. But in choosing to be refreshing, he chose one at which he could be a real success.

Now, this vocation was no more suited to Onesiphorus than it is to you and me. We can make a success of it too. It is really the only vocation I know at which every one can succeed. All of us cannot sing. I have known quite a few singers who did it poorly. All of us cannot preach. I have known more than one preacher to fail at it. All of us cannot succeed in business or in medicine or at law. All of us cannot give large gifts nor serve in a conspicuous way. But everybody can be refreshing. This is a vocation that is open to little children. It is open to youth in life's green spring. It is open to the man in middle life. It is open to the battered old body that is nearing the sunset and the evening star. To choose this vocation, therefore, is to choose one at which you can certainly make a success.

4. The wisdom of this choice is further seen in the fact that this is a vocation at which we can work anywhere and at any time. Some complain of their environment. Their field is too narrow and small to afford any opportunity for real service. But that is never the case if your vocation is being refreshing. Enoch had a mean environment. Read the fifth chapter of Genesis. It is far more prosaic than the multiplication table. It says, "So-and-So" lived so many years, begat "So-and-So," and died. The next verse reads the same way. "So-and-So" lived so many years, begat "So-and-So," and died.

There is a little row of cradles here and a little row of coffins there, and a procession of petty people climbing out of the cradles, walking a few steps, and toppling over into the coffins. That is all there is to it. It was a desert-like environment. Yet Enoch was refreshing in the midst of it. When the writer to the Hebrews tells his story, he says, "Enoch was not found." That is, folks missed him when he was gone. The day was less bright and the night was more black for his absence, because while he lived among them, he was refreshing.

Sometimes you find it in your heart to envy those who are giving their lives in some difficult mission field. But you do not have to be a missionary in order to be refreshing. At times you look with envy upon the preacher of the Word. But you do not have to be in the pulpit in order to be refreshing. You can make a success of this vocation in the most hidden and obscure place in all the world. You can succeed at it in the city or in the country. You can succeed at it in the home or on the street or down in the office. You can succeed at it in the social circle or even upon a sick-bed. Anywhere, any time, if you will, you can practice and practice successfully this finest of vocations; you can be refreshing.

5. This choice was wise, finally, because this vocation is the only truly satisfactory way that we can use our lives. Broadly speaking, there are two classes of people in the world: those who are giving their energies to the task of finding refreshment for themselves, and those who are spending themselves in order to refresh others. The one group is always disappointed. The other is always making glad discoveries. The one finds wretched-

ness; the other finds abiding joy. Again and again have I been impressed by the light that illuminates the faces of those who are really giving themselves for others. I had the pleasure recently of meeting a group of missionaries who were toiling in difficult fields. How radiant they were! How full of an inner gaiety of spirit! For it is literally true that "he that seeks to save his life shall lose it, and he that loses his life shall keep it to life eternal."

III

How did Onesiphorus succeed in refreshing Paul?

1. He went to see him. He paid him a visit. That is simple. It did not take a genius to do that. It did not take a great amount of culture. It did take courage. It did require a loving heart. Onesiphorus evidently did not know Rome. Therefore, he had great difficulty in finding his friend. He inquired and received directions that sent him from one side of the city to the other. A less loyal soul would have given up the search and gone home. But he refused to be discouraged. He sought till he found. Therefore, Paul wrote, "The Lord give mercy unto the household of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain. But when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day."

2. Then I have an idea that he let Paul know that he appreciated him. How refreshing is appreciation! How much more smoothly the machinery of the world would run if it were only oiled now and then with the beauti-

ful lubricant of appreciation. We do our work better everywhere when we know we are appreciated. It sweetens home duties and takes all the drudgery out of the most prosaic task. It makes the hand of the physician and of the nurse more tender and skillful. It makes the toiler in every department of life more willing and more efficient. It is something that enriches both him that gives and him that takes. It is something that the more we express it the more abundantly we possess it. It is something that is as refreshing as bread to the hungry, as water to the thirsty.

George R. Stuart told this charming story out of his own experience. He was at a railroad station in a certain Southern town. An old lady approached the man who was both agent and baggage-man in one, and asked, "When is the next train to Waco?" "Four o'clock," he answered graciously. "Ain't there none before four?" "None," he replied, still smiling. "None before four? Are you sure?" she persisted. He answered, still smiling, "I am sure." "Then I'll have to wait till it comes?" "Yes, you must wait," still good-naturedly. "But where am I going to set at?" "You can come right in my office and be seated, and I will tell you when the train comes." "Are you sure you won't forget?" she continued. "Quite sure," he replied, still smiling. Meantime, dozens of hurrying, half-angry people were calling on him for tickets and baggage checks. The great beads of perspiration were rolling down his face, but he never ceased to smile, and he never said an ungracious word.

At last the train came and went. He then drew his old pipe from his pocket and threw himself down on a trunk

for a few puffs of smoke. Dr. Stuart, seeing this, sent his secretary out for some excellent cigars. When these had come, he walked over to the agent and said, "My friend, you have just passed through a rather stormy session. I noticed that never for a moment did you lose your temper. You were a courteous gentleman through it all. You strike me as a man who would enjoy a good smoke. I am giving you these with my compliments." And the agent's face lighted, and the big tears dropped unheeded upon his shirt-front. He looked at the preacher in grateful amazement. "Sir," he said, "I have been working in this office for sixteen years, and you are the first man that ever offered me a word of commendation, and I'll be dogged if I don't appreciate it."

3. Then I have an idea that Onesiphorus refreshed Paul by his sympathy. Not that he necessarily told Paul that he sympathized with him. He did not have to. The fact that he was there showed that he cared. Paul could see that his visitor was under the load with him, and through that sympathy he was cheered and rested and refreshed. Real sympathy is always refreshing to those who have burdened hearts. There are times when all need it. Even the strong Son of God Himself hungered and hungered intensely for human sympathy. Many a man has gone out into the dark for the lack of it. Many another has been saved to himself and to society and to his Lord by having it given at the right time.

Over in Richmond, Virginia, a few years ago there lived a man who was a rather forbidding and ungracious neighbor. He had no intimate friends. He would

not permit himself to have any. But one day there came into his life a great and crushing sorrow. His boy died under circumstances that were peculiarly distressing. There were some few who felt sorry for him, but they dared not visit him. There was, however, one exception. Even this man went not without fear and trembling. When at his ring the door was opened, he said simply, "I have heard of your sorrow, and I have come to extend the sympathy of a Christian brother." At that word, the fountains of the father's grief welled up. He fell on the shoulder of his visitor and sobbed like a little child. When he had sufficiently mastered his emotions, he said, "Since you have been kind enough to come, let me show you something." He led him upstairs to his bedroom. "You see that," he said, pointing to a revolver that lay upon a table. "I was just preparing to use that when the door-bell rang. I want you to know that your visit has saved me."

4. Not only did Onesiphorus refresh Paul by what he did; he refreshed him by what he was. To shake hands with him was like getting the handclasp of spring. There was a fine spontaneity about his helpfulness. Why is that rose so red? It has not put on an extra coat of rouge. It is natural with it. It cannot help being red. Why does Niagara thunder? It is not exerting itself. It thunders naturally. Why does that mountain climb so high that it needs must wrap the fleecy folds of the clouds about its bony shoulders? It is not tiptoeing. It was made that way. Why does that bird sing with such ravishing sweetness? It cannot help it.

"The little bird sits at his door in the sun,
Atilt like a blossom among the leaves,
And lets his illumined being o'errun
With the deluge of summer it receives."

And why is Onesiphorus refreshing? He has been so deluged with spiritual summer that it is natural with him. Thank God, it may be so with all of us. For Jesus says, "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink. He that believeth on me—out of his inner life shall flow rivers of living water."

XIII

MAKING LIFE COUNT—AUTHOR OF HEBREWS

Hebrews 12: 1–2

> "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus."

The author is writing to a group of Jewish Christians. They are not finding the new life upon which they have entered easy. They are rather finding it distressingly full of difficulties. They are being persecuted. They are being robbed of their goods. There are bitter foes without and within. Some of them are, therefore, greatly discouraged. More than one is half persuaded that his conversion has been no more than a mistake. Some are looking wistfully back to the old life and wondering if it would not be wise to renounce Christianity as a sheer futility.

Now, it is to hearten these that the author writes this letter. He reminds them that their crucified Master is God's supreme revelation. He urges them to hold fast their profession. He warns them against falling short of the grace of God. He calls to the witness stand saint after saint to give testimony to the value of faith, and to the

reality of things not seen. "Do not lose courage," he urges. "But rather lay aside every weight and run with patience the race set before you."

Not only does he urge upon these the importance and the necessity of being loyal to their faith, but he gives them in our text some very definite and helpful directions for the living of the Christian life. He is telling them how they may surely win. He is indicating to them how they may make life count in the very finest fashion. The directions that he gives are just as pertinent in this twentieth century as they were in the first. Therefore, we should do well to listen to this experienced saint as he instructs us how to make a success of the greatest of all enterprises, the enterprise of Christian living.

I

The first direction he gives is this, "Let us run." "Being a Christian," he tells us at once, "is a strenuous matter. It is an exacting business." He is seeking to encourage these faltering saints. But he will not do so by concealing the facts. He does not tell them that to be a Christian is the easiest way to get through life. He makes no appeal to their cowardice or to their love of ease. He rather appeals to the heroic. He is finely frank in letting them know that to follow Christ means conflict. It means a race to be run, a stubborn battle to be fought.

In speaking thus, he is in harmony with the whole New Testament. "Put on the whole armor of God," urges Paul, "that you may be able to stand against the stratagems of the Devil." There are outward and visible

foes that are strong. But these are as nothing, he warns us, to the foes that are spiritual and unseen. "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood." We are, therefore, to put on the whole armor of God that we may be able to stand in the day of battle, and having fought the battle through to the finish, remain victors on the field.

Then Paul's words are in harmony with the teaching of his Master. "Are there few that be saved?" they asked him one day. Listen to his answer. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." Strive: that is a muscular word. It has panting breath. It has sweat-grimed hands. Its face is flecked with blood. Strive: this word is at home on the athletic field. We are to strive as in a game. It is at home on the field of battle. We are to strive as in a deadly conflict. It is even at home in Gethsemane. We are to strive somewhat as did the Master when his sweat was as great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

"Let us run." That speaks of white-heat earnestness. To make life count anywhere we have to give our best. To make it count as Christians is certainly no exception. I am aware of the fact that this is not the impression that one would get from the average church. If a visitor were to come among us from Mars, he would not likely be greatly impressed by our earnestness. He would not be reminded by many of us of runners on the race course. He would likely see little of the ardor of crusaders, or of the grim determination of soldiers going into battle. That is one of our most glaring sins. That accounts for much of our failure. An indifferent hare, be he ever so fleet-footed, will always lose the race to a

tortoise who is earnest enough to keep running at his best.

Then it might be worthy of notice that this is a race set before us. It is not one set round about us, nor is it one set behind us. That sounds trite, I know. It almost smacks of the ridiculous, yet I have met quite a few runners who were going in circles. I have met others who seemed to be bending every energy to run backward. The other day a football player got possession of the ball and carried it sixty-nine yards toward his own goal. He ran, and ran hard, but he ran in the wrong direction. I am afraid I have seen that same thing happen in the Church more than once. Let us run the race set before us. It is only as we face forward that we can hope to win.

II

Not only are we to run, but we are to run stripped of every handicap. That is only reasonable. That is just plain common sense. Our first and supreme purpose is to win the race. Nothing else really matters. Whatever will be of help, we must take. Whatever will hinder, we must put aside. Surely we ought to be willing to do this to obtain an incorruptible crown. Over and over again this is what the athlete does to obtain a crown that is at once very fleeting and of little worth.

1. If we expect to run this race successfully, we must put aside sin. That does not mean the great glaring sins, simply. It means every sin, for there is nothing that so hampers us, that so clips the thews of our strength, as conscious sin. How grandly adequate was Samson until

he broke his vows of consecration. But his vows broken, his strength went from him and he became weak as any other man. In one of his charming stories, Ralph Connor tells of a football game between two Canadian universities. The star player on one of these teams was Cameron. Normally he was quick of eye, skillful, accurate and courageous. He was the pride of his team and the hope of his college. But the night before the great game, Cameron broke the training rules and got on a drunk. The next day his nerves went to pieces. Instead of being the strength of his team, he became its weakness. His college lost when it had every chance to win. That game came to be known in the annals of the school as the game that was lost because Cameron was not fit. How many times have we lost because through sin we were spiritually unfit.

2. Not only are we to put aside every sin, but also every weight. Now a weight is something that is not sinful in itself, but that we allow to become sinful for us because of our wrong use of it. There are many things that are good in themselves that we allow to become weights. There are many things that ought to be helps that become handicaps. Right now I have in mind a man who a dozen years ago was one of the most useful men in the church of which he was a member. He was a very busy man, just beginning to win attention in his profession. But he was not too busy to be present at every service at his church and to be interested in all its interests. At that time he was poor enough to drive a Ford. But with the passing of the years he became conspicuously successful. As his success increased, his in-

terest in the Kingdom of God seemed to decrease. Today he never darkens the door of the church that was once dear to him. His home is a wreck, and the success that should have greatly added to his usefulness became a weight that led to his ruin.

"Let us lay aside every weight." This is the acid test of the amusement question. Pastors are being constantly asked whether it is right to engage in this or that pastime. It may be right for one, and wrong for another. This is the test. Does it help, or does it hinder you in the running of your Christian race? Do you run more swiftly after the card party, after the ball, than you did before? Whatever helps, cling to it. Whatever hurts, throw it away. How many there are who might be swift runners, yet are going at a mere snail's pace because they refuse to apply this test.

On my way to school one day as a boy I noticed a crow walking about in the shallow water of the Buffalo River. As I crossed the river, he arose and flew. But, to my surprise, he did not fly more than thirty feet. As I approached he flew again, but this time his flight was still shorter. The next, it was shorter still. At last I was able to catch him with my hands. What was the matter with him? Nobody had shot him. Nobody had plucked his wings. He was not wounded in any fashion. But while walking in the water he had stepped his toe into a mussel shell and that mussel had closed on it. The crow had become weighted. The weight did not kill him, it only robbed him of his possibilities and made him an easy prey to his enemies.

Over in the hills of Tennessee, years ago, a man killed

a great American eagle. He killed this eagle with a charge of bird shot. The hunter wondered how this king of the air, that was usually so wild, allowed him to get close enough to kill him after this fashion. He was such a magnificent bird, measuring seven feet from tip to tip. But when the hunter took a closer look at him he found that an old steel trap clung to one of his legs. That trap did not kill the eagle, it did not break his wings. But it held him so close to the earth that indirectly it proved the death of him.

And what a parable is this! What spread of wings some of us have! How we might soar! How grandly we might win the race! But we are weighted down. We remain very close to the earth. We become an easy prey to our enemies. And this is true, not because we renounce our faith altogether. It is true, not because we insist upon clinging to open sin. It is true because we refuse to lay aside every weight. I do not know what your weight is. You do not know what mine is. Its name does not matter. It may be business. It may be too many social engagements. It may be something altogether harmless in itself. But if it robs us of our possibilities and makes us fail in the race, then it becomes as tragic and ruinous as open sin.

III

Not only must we run stripped of all hindrances, but we must run with patience. We must persist. We must exercise patient endurance. This race is not a hundred-yard dash. It is rather a long cross-country run that

stretches away to the horizon. Therefore, if we would win we must have patience. We must have patience with ourselves. We must not give up in despair at the first failure. We must have patience with others. We must have patience with God. He does not always act as we think He ought. To help us in winning and keeping fine grace of patience, the author gives the following considerations.

1. Some are losing patience because they are meeting with opposition. They are finding the Christian life distressingly difficult. "Do not be impatient on that account," he urges. "Opposition is to be expected." "Any bit of driftwood can float down stream, but to go against the current requires effort. God does not promise exemption from conflict. You are not to be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease. Christ himself did not find life easy. He had to endure the contradictions of sinners. Therefore, if you find yourself opposed, remember that He was opposed also. If you find the race is a strenuous uphill business you are only sharing the experience of all the saints. Therefore do not allow the opposition you are meeting to destroy your patience."

2. Next, he urges them to patience because they have no right to lose heart under so slight persecution as they have had to suffer up to this time. Many of those whose names they honor were persecuted even unto death, he reminds them. But they did not for that reason lose patience. On the contrary they kept their patience and died in the faith. "Do you, therefore, not give up," he urges. "You have not yet gone the limit. You have not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin. Before you quit

and say there is nothing in Christianity, give it a fair test. If you have staked your life on Jesus and He has failed you, then you have a right to be impatient, but not until then."

3. He encourages them to have patience by telling them that suffering is not a mark of God's displeasure. It is rather a mark of sonship. "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him." "If you are finding life a bit stormy," he tells them, "it is because God is dealing with you as with His own children. It is a mark of His love and not of His forgetfulness. Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth. Suffering is not necessarily an evil. It may be the means of great good. The tenderest hearts are usually those that have been broken. The choicest souls are those that have been to Gethsemane for their schooling. Therefore, be patient. God will kiss your tears into jewels and change your sorrows into songs."

IV

The final direction this saint gives for the running of the race is that we are to run, looking unto Jesus. The literal translation is that we are to look away from everything else to Jesus. That is, our eyes are to be fixed upon Him, and upon Him alone. We are not to fix them upon our assets. We are not to fix them upon our liabilities. We are to look to Him. Peter's venture upon the water was entirely successful so long as he kept his eyes upon Jesus. It was when he saw the wind boisterous that he lost his faith and began to sink.

1. We are to look to Jesus as our example. We are not to undertake to run the race, looking at the hypocrites in the church. To look in that direction is to run in that direction. We are not to run, looking at some faulty church member. We are not even to run looking unto the preacher. The preacher should be a good man. God have mercy on the minister of the gospel who is without the grace of God. But even he is not the one whom you are to follow, or to whom you are to look. You are to run looking unto Jesus.

2. We are to run, looking to Jesus as our Saviour and constant Helper. An example is well enough in its place, but you and I need more than that. As another has pointed out, an example may be very discouraging and very depressing. It would be useless for Shakespeare to write Hamlet's Soliloquy and then tell me to write like that. It would be useless for Turner to splash one of his marvelous sunsets on the canvas as an example for me to follow. I should merely be filled with discouragement and despair. It is useless for Christ to walk from the manger to the Cross and tell me to live like that. He must do more than set me an example. He must save me. He must keep me. He must give me power to follow Him.

And that He has promised to do, and that promise He actually keeps. No man who runs with his eyes fixed on Jesus ever loses the race. All we need is in Him. All we need, He is eager to supply. Let us look to Him. He will give us strength to renounce sin. He will give us power to throw away our weights. He will enable us to run with patient endurance. "Look unto Me and be ye saved

all ye ends of the earth." "They looked unto Him and were radiant and their faces were not ashamed." Ours also will become radiant with transformation and with victory if we run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus.

XIV

A WHOLE-HEARTED SAINT—CALEB

Joshua 14: 8

"But I wholly followed the Lord my God."

I

HERE is a man telling his experience. He has an experience that is worth hearing about. He had a grand yesterday. He has a noble present. He is looking out expectantly upon to-morrow. He is accounting for all that he has been, all that he is, all that he hopes to be. "If you want to know the source of whatever is of worth in me," he tells us frankly, "I answer that all my springs are in Him. If you want to know the sun under which I have grown strong and radiant, it is the Sun of Righteousness that has risen upon me with healing in His beams. All that I am or hope to be I owe to the fact that I am a follower of God."

And mark you, Caleb is not swollen with conceit. He is not boasting, he is testifying. He is no swaggerer. A man is not conceited because he tells the truth about himself. If Caleb is boasting in this testimony, he is certainly not boasting in himself, he is boasting in the Lord. And, of course, such boasting is always helpful.

"My soul shall make her boast in the Lord. The humble shall hear thereof and be glad."

So we rejoice in his testimony. We rejoice also in the quiet confidence with which he tells his story. He realizes that what he is saying is not creating any great surprise. His testimony is not shocking or scandalizing anyone who knows him. His wife has been an open book. It has been a living epistle known and read of all. When he declares that he has been a follower of God, he is aware that he is stating a truth to which those who know him most intimately cannot but bear witness.

Then, too, I think we cannot fail to detect a note of deep gladness in this testimony. There is solid joy and satisfaction in it. Caleb is not wringing his hands in vain regret over ill-spent years. He rather rejoices over all his radiant yesterdays. He looks back upon them with grateful and humble heart. And is it not significant that no single soul has ever been found who looked with regret upon a life of loyal service to God? Men have regretted their loyalty to all other gods. They have deplored their devotion to all other masters. "O had I but served my God with half the zeal with which I served my king He would not in mine old age have left me naked to mine enemies." But there is no regret in the testimony of Caleb. Nor is there in that of any other that has ever served our gracious Lord.

Not only does Caleb claim that he has been a follower of God, but he uses a word to describe his following that most of us dare not use. He says, "I wholly followed the Lord my God. I have given Him my undivided allegiance. I have served Him with whole-hearted devotion.

I have not been a straddler. I have not been lukewarm. I have given to Him the loyalty of my whole soul. I have placed God in my affections where He ought always to be placed, I have placed Him first. I wholly followed the Lord my God."

Now, if I had been in that testimony meeting, I am afraid that I should have become a little frightened just here. I might have said to myself, "Be careful, Caleb, you are a good man, but keep your feet on the ground. Do not claim too much. Do not be a fanatic. You have followed God, I know, but to be convinced that you have followed Him wholly, I must ask those that know you best." But when I ask them, their testimony only serves to confirm what Caleb has said of himself. Moses bears witness to his whole-hearted devotion. He declares that Caleb wholly followed the Lord. And God Himself speaks to the same purpose, declaring that he had followed Him fully. Therefore, we are safe in believing that Caleb is not claiming too much for himself when he says, "I wholly followed the Lord my God."

But this does not mean, of course, that Caleb was faultless. It does not mean that he never blundered. It does not mean that he never made a mistake. He was not absolutely perfect. When a man is whole-hearted in his devotion to his business, that does not indicate that he is a perfect business man. It does not even mean that he never does anything but attend to business. It does mean that he puts his business first. When pleasure and business clash, pleasure is brushed aside. Or if pleasure is enjoyed it is not an end in itself. It is a recreation. Its ultimate purpose is to help in the better transaction of

business. Thus was Caleb whole-hearted in his devotion to God. In all matters he put God first.

This whole-heartedness accounts for the great success he made of life. It is the lack of this on the part of so many that constitutes the greatest weakness of the Church to-day. We are religious, we are Christian after a fashion, but too few of us are whole-hearted. And it is the whole-hearted man that wins. Take Abraham and Lot, for instance. They were both religious men. They were both altar-builders. They were both men of prayer. Had they belonged to First Church, they would both have been on the Official Board. Abraham would have been on because he deserved such recognition, and because we could not run the Church without him. Lot would have been on because he was kin to Abraham. But, while they were both religious, in the ultimate outcome of their lives they were as far apart as night is from day.

Why this difference? It was not, I repeat, that Abraham believed in God while Lot did not. It was not that one was interested in things spiritual while the other had no interest at all. The difference is just here: Abraham's religion was the biggest fact about him. Every question of his life was tested by the will of God. But Lot's religion never mastered him. God never fully took captive his heart. Therefore, when there came a clash between his religion and his material interest, his religion went down. When there came a clash between the will of God and the will of Lot, it was the will of Lot that won. It is not surprising, therefore, that, while Abraham represents to us all that is most beautiful and win-

some in sainthood, Lot glares at us across the centuries a charred and blackened ruin. The only message that comes to us from his dumb lips is, "Do not waste your life as I wasted mine. Do not fling yourself away as I flung myself away."

II

"But I wholly followed the Lord my God." This is the fountain. What of the stream that flowed out from it? What kind of man did God make out of Caleb? What did He do for this believing heart who dared give himself wholly to Him?

1. He made him a man of great faith. I am remembering, of course, that it is through faith that Caleb came to know God. But it was in loyalty to Him that he found a larger and ever-growing faith. The weakness of our faith, as a rule, is not born of our intellectual difficulties but of our moral lapses. The man who fails to obey his oracle will find its voice gradually hushed into silence. The man who fails to follow the gleam will find that the light becomes darkened. But he who obeys will find his oracle speaking with ever greater certainty and the gleam shining with ever clearer light. It is in wholehearted loyalty to the faith we have that we find a larger faith.

At our first meeting with Caleb, he impresses us with the greatness of his faith. He has just returned with the other spies from exploring the land of Canaan. All the spies are not of one mind. They do not bring in a unanimous report. There is a majority report and a minority report. Both reports agree that the land just explored

is well worth possessing. It is a land flowing with milk and honey. But the majority, which is made up of ten, declares that the difficulties in the way of getting possession of the land are so great as to make any effort in that direction an absolute futility.

Then it is that Caleb comes forward. With great difficulty he gets attention. But he compels the people to hear him. He stills them, for he speaks with conviction. Then he declares that he is as well aware of the difficulties as the majority. But he is absolutely certain that these difficulties can be overcome. "Let us go up at once and possess it," he cries with hot enthusiasm. "These giants will be but bread for us. We shall be all the stronger for the conflict. God has given us the land. Victory is certain, if we only dare to claim it."

What an asset is Caleb! What an asset is any man who is possessed of a valiant and victorious faith! While the doubters discuss problems and whine about impossibilities, he claims victory. While the doubters look at the difficulties and become unmanned as they see certain failure, he looks at God and becomes strong and with a sense of certain victory. It is ever the man of faith who subdues kingdoms, works righteousness, stops the mouths of lions, quenches the violence of fire, turns to flight the armies of the aliens, out of weakness is made strong.

2. He was a man of courage. His courage was the natural outcome of his faith. The highest type of courage always has this as its secret: "I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved." How fearless is Elijah as he stands

in the presence of Ahab. Without a tremor he rebukes him to his face. "As the Lord God liveth before whom I stand." What is the secret of his fearlessness? He is so keenly conscious of the presence of the King that he utterly forgets to be afraid in the presence of a king. Faith is ever the mother of courage.

"Let us go up at once and possess it." It took courage to say that. Caleb was representing a most insignificant minority. He was opposed by a vast majority that was discouraged and impatient and angry. To take the stand that he took meant not only facing the sneers and ridicule of the majority, it meant positive physical danger. This majority was fast becoming a frenzied mob that was threatening to stone him for making the mad proposal that he was now making. Then he had the courage to be eager to go against a confessedly strong and powerful enemy. He knew that there were walled cities in the land of Canaan. He knew that the people were strong and of gigantic size. But he was ready to dare all in conflict with them. He was prepared then and there to bet his life that God would keep faith with them and give them the victory. Thus he dared brave the ridicule and threats of his own people and the strength of the enemy because his faith had made him a man of high courage.

3. Then he was possessed of a beautiful and Christ-like patience. Caleb's resolution to go up at once and possess the land was voted down by an overwhelming majority. His sound advice was set aside. He was absolutely sure he was right. He was absolutely sure that their position was wrong. But he showed no anger or resentment when he was out-voted. He did not with-

draw and refuse to have anything further to do with this faithless and cowardly crowd. He still believed that with all their faults they were the hope of the world.

How disappointing and heavy of heart this believing man must have been as he was compelled to turn his face from the land of his dreams back to the wilderness. But he never whined. He never said, "I told you so." I think he helped his own generation to die as peacefully as possible. I think he gave himself heart and soul to training the younger generation for a larger faith than that possessed by the generation to which he belonged. "If my generation has failed," he said to himself, "the world ever moves forward on the feet of youth. We must train another generation to be more loyal and more faithful than we have been." So, with Christ-like patience he worked and waited.

4. He was a man who never grew old. We meet him again almost fifty years after this tragic failure at Kadesh-barnea. He is now eighty-five years old. But he is still beautifully and winsomely young. Truly, winter has been visiting him every year, but he has always been too busy entertaining spring to give it welcome. December has knocked at his door every twelve months, but his heart has been so full of June that this icy visitor could never gain entrance. He lived his life in an abiding morning. He possessed the secret of perpetual youth.

Being always young his face was confidently toward the future. There are some who feel in the very morning-tide that they have already lived their lives. They begin to look wistfully back to their dead yesterdays. The present holds little; the future, nothing. Such say sadly,

"Youth is folly, manhood struggle, old age regret." But Caleb at eighty-five is just as expectant and just as eager and just as enthusiastic about the future as he was almost fifty years ago.

Then he possesses the fine audacity and madness of youth. He is still eager to adventure. He is still full of fiery daring. He has lost none of his winsome impetuosity. How fine that is! Time completely tames and subdues most of us. It puts out the fires of our enthusiasm. It slows down the quick beating of our hot hearts. We become very sane and prudent and dull. We get to the place where we are no longer seers of visions nor dreamers of dreams. But it was not the case with Caleb. He found a way to avoid this tragedy. "Even the youth shall faint and be weary and the young man shall utterly fall." Caleb knew this quite as well as we. But he knew that there was a gracious preventive. He knew that "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." So he had found in his own experience. Therefore, this youth of eighty-five summers comes to Joshua with the request that he be given the hardest task in the kingdom. He is burningly eager at this late day to undertake the most difficult job he has ever undertaken. He has wholly followed the Lord, and so following he has lived in a perpetual springtime.

5. He became an abiding benediction. He was a great blessing to his fellows. What service he rendered to those who knew him personally none but God will ever know. Then he left the lands that he had conquered as an inheritance to those who should come after him. Finally, he left something infinitely more worthful than

lands or gold, a wealth which I trust is making you and me the richer to this hour. He left the rich legacy of a life grandly lived in unswerving loyalty to God.

It is ever so with those who wholly follow the Lord. When my father fell asleep he did not leave much in the way of material wealth to his children, though the hands that were folded on his breast were hands that were calloused by toil. What little he did leave is no longer ours. The old house is untenanted and in ruins. The few fields are in other hands. But the real treasure he left us has only grown the richer with the passing of the years. He left us the memory of a father who was afraid of no sacrifice in order to prepare his children for life. He left us the memory of a father who kept the fires of prayer constantly burning upon the altar of his home. He left us the bracing and gripping memory of one who for almost three quarters of a century followed the Lord his God. And no man can leave a finer legacy.

XV

MR. SORROWFUL—JABEZ

I Chronicles 4: 9

"His mother called his name Jabez."

"His mother called his name Jabez." What a pity! Think of going through life labeled after that fashion. Think of having to keep house from the cradle to the grave with that ugly name. Jabez! Think of having to answer when that horrid word was shouted at you. Yet this was the cruel wrong that was inflicted upon an innocent lad many years ago. And strange to say it was inflicted not by an enemy, nor even by an indifferent stranger. It was inflicted by the boy's own mother. His mother called his name Jabez. It makes one feel like saying, "And thou, too, Brutus."

But if to be named Jabez would be a calamity to-day it was far more so in that distant time. Names meant something then. They were descriptive of the individual named. That, of course, is no longer the case. It is now possible to meet a fullback on the Varsity team named Percivale, or a prospective heavyweight champion entitled Willie. Even if we should hear a heavy-fisted, masculine woman answering to the name of Flossie, we

would not be greatly surprised. Jabez is Jabez now, only that and nothing more. But in that day Jabez meant something. It meant sorrowful. "His mother called his name Sorrowful saying, because I bare him with sorrow."

I

Now the first fact that strikes us about Mr. Sorrowful is that he was a man with a handicap. As is the case with so many others, he did not have an even chance at life. Just what his handicap was, we are not told. His name was in itself a handicap if there was nothing else wrong. To be called Sorrowful, to have a name suggestive of calamity, tragedy, misfortune, that of itself could not but go far toward casting a shadow over this man's life. But his handicap was something more than his name. It was not for nothing that his mother called him Jabez. Why was it?

1. Since his mother named him instead of his father, it has been reasonably suggested that his father died before he was born. Mothers did not name their children in that far-off day. That was the privilege of the father. It might be that his mother in her sorrow gave her son a name that was a reminder of the bitter memories of yesterday instead of one redolent of the hopes of tomorrow. It may be she so named him in fear for his future, deprived as he was of a father's protection and a father's care.

2. Possibly she gave him this name in the realization of the barren environment in which he was to live his life. To be convinced that his environment was barren

it is only necessary to read this chapter that tells us all we know of his life. It is one of the desert chapters of the Bible. Reading it is like trudging over hot sands. But as you make your wearying and monotonous way through the drab waste you come suddenly, and with glad surprise, upon this bit of oasis that tells of Jabez. He gives to the situation its one touch of life, its one thrill of beauty. All else is ugliness and death.

3. Then it is possible that his handicap grew out of the fact that he had been robbed of his property, either by his older brothers or by others through the cowardice of his brothers. It may be that the mother, seeing that her son was destined to grow up impoverished, called his name Jabez in token of the fact that he was going to have to face what seemed to her the heavy handicap of poverty. Of course, it is altogether possible that this mother feared poverty entirely too much. Poverty is at times a handicap. It is possible that the poet was speaking about a real character when he sang:

> "But knowledge to his eyes her ample scroll,
> Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll.
> Chill penury suppressed his noble rage,
> And froze the genial current of the soul."

But while there is possibly one here and there whose noble rage is suppressed by poverty, it is safe to say that for every one of this kind there are at least one hundred whose noble rage is smothered under an avalanche of ease and luxury. If poverty has slain its thousands, certainly wealth has slain its tens of thousands. Other things being equal, there is far less danger of ultimate

failure for the young man that has to struggle against the handicap of poverty, than for him who is hampered by too great wealth. Had I been present, therefore, I should certainly have reminded this too despondent mother of this fact. Had I been able to convince her, she might have given her son at once a more beautiful and a more hopeful name.

But, whatever his handicap, this much we know: he was never allowed to forget it. He was hounded by it night and day. He was reminded of it every time he was called to his meals. He was reminded of it whenever he was sent on an errand. It shrieked at him whenever he was spoken to by a friend. He met its ugly grimace whenever he was introduced to a stranger. It jeered at him every time he signed his name. Always, night and day, and day and night, he was being persistently reminded that something was wrong. His unfortunate name would not allow him to forget for a single moment. This, of course, greatly added to the weight of his burden. Everybody stood ready to say, "Poor Jabez."

II

Now, what was the reaction of Jabez to his handicap? That is the important question.

First, he did not allow it to make him a coward. He might have used his very name as an excuse for self-pity. He might have used it as an alibi behind which to hide his weakness and laziness. He might have spent his best hours tormenting his friends by telling them the great things he would have done, or would do, but for

his handicap. He might have so fixed his attention upon his lack as to have forgotten what he actually possessed. He might have spent so much time bewailing his liabilities that he would have allowed his assets to go utterly to waste. How foolish to let what we do not have prevent our wise use of what we really do have! Yet it is a type of folly all too common. But Jabez did not belong to this class.

Neither did Jabez allow his handicap to make him hard and cruel. There are some who fail in the face of a handicap through surrender. There are others who fail through losing all the milk of human kindness in the process of overcoming. I have known men to win against great odds, but their success afforded little cause for congratulation. This was the case because in the process of winning they had become rock-like men. But they were not like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. They were rather like the ragged rock upon which good ships are broken and wrecked. It is far better that we should fail, as the world sees failure, than that we should succeed at the price of getting icicles in our hearts.

Nor did Jabez surrender to his handicap by giving way to bitterness and hate. He might have rebelled against God on account of the wrongs or misfortunes he had suffered. He might have even charged God with the evil that had come to him at the hands of men. I buried a man not long ago who quit the church that he loved because of some wrong he had suffered at the hands of one connected with that church. How foolish, and how unjust, especially when we remember that God was far more deeply wounded by the wrong than the man

himself. Jabez refused to become a hater. Hate may hurt its object, but it is certain hell for him who is its possessor. He refused to let his handicap kill his faith in God.

What, then, did he do with his handicap? He brought it to God. He allowed it to send him to his knees. We remember him after all these centuries, especially for one thing, and one thing only, and that is his winsome and worthful prayer. "And Jabez called upon the God of Israel." He refused to lose heart and hope. He faced forward and upward. He said, "What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee." No handicap can be fatal for such a man. In fact, it can do nothing but hasten him toward his desired haven. Wise Jabez! He will live to thank God for the very things that he thought were going to prove his undoing. He will find that his very weakness has become his strength, that his want has been changed to inexhaustible wealth.

III

Notice next the content of this man's prayer. For what does Jabez make request?

"O that Thou wouldest bless me indeed." You will notice that he does not ask for the removal of his handicap. He does not ask that his load be made lighter. He does not ask for success or for prosperity or for victory over his enemies. He is seeking something far bigger and better. He knows that material success might mean spiritual poverty. He knows that material victory might mean utter moral defeat. Therefore, he asks that God bless him indeed. "Lord," he seems to say, "send me

want or wealth, sickness or health, laughter or tears according to my needs. Thou knowest me better than I know myself. Give me that which is best for me. That which will mean a real blessing."

Then he dares be specific. He utters three petitions. The granting of these requests, he believes, would mean a blessing indeed. Listen to them. I do not name them in their order.

1. He asks that the hand of God might be with him. Down in the city the other day, a little girl ran ahead of her mother till she came to the street crossing. Then she reached for mother's hand. The way was too dangerous for her to go alone. So Jabez is reaching for God's hand. Life is too beset by perils. It is at times difficult to know which way to go. It is at times lonely. Always there is a need of God. "That Thy hand might be with me." To ask for the hand of God is to ask for the presence of God Himself.

2. He prays that God will keep him from evil. "That Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me." Understand, he does not ask for freedom from work. He is not asking for an easy place. He is not asking to be "Carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease." He is asking only that he be kept from the one thing that can hurt and mar and blight either in time or in eternity, and that one thing is sin. His prayer is very like that offered by the Master centuries later. "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." So Jabez prays, asking not a cloister, not for exemption from battle, only that he might be kept from evil.

And the keeping desired strikes us as a lifetime programme. Jabez is not asking that he be forgiven after a life wasted in sin. He is not seeking to use religion as a mere fire-escape. He is not seeking to fling himself into God's arms when he has nothing to give but energies wrecked and wasted by long years in the far country by the swine trough. He is asking for a salvation that means loyalty to God from Maytime to December, from morningtide to the evening shadows. "That Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me."

3. He prayed for the enlarging life. "Enlarge my coast." Doubtless he is asking God to help him to get back his material possessions. And there is no objection to such a prayer. It is perfectly right to talk to God about your material interests. He Himself taught us to pray for our daily bread. But I am persuaded that there is something far bigger than that in this prayer. He is asking also that he might inherit his spiritual possessions. He wants to live life grandly and nobly. The little nations of Europe are constantly clamoring for an outlet to the sea. This man is asking God to give him an outlet to the infinite sea. He wants his coast enlarged, his horizon pushed back. He wants life to become big and roomy, as big and roomy as eternity.

Life is a very narrow and circumscribed affair for many of us. That is one reason we are so restless and dissatisfied. We can never be at home in a narrow world. Some time ago I saw a pig in a pen that was so small that I do not think he could have turned round in it. Yet that pig seemed as contented and happy as a pig could be. There was a spring near by that was bubbling up over

white pebbles. But the thought of it near, but beyond his reach, did not disturb him. The big world that lay behind the hills did not make him restless. The lure of the open spaces did not torment him. He was quite at home in his narrow house. He had his swill and that was enough.

A few days later I stood by the cage of an eagle. It was a roomy cage with a lovely setting. But the eagle looked out through the bars with lackluster eyes. His great wings were folded in permanent uselessness. Every line of his body denoted dejection, hopelessness, and despair. No creature could ever seem less at home. What was the matter? He was made for a more roomy environment. The distant mountain crags were calling to him. The far vault of blue haunted him. He longed to "bathe his plumage in the thunder's home." And bird of prey though he was, I could not but pity him. In fact, I should have been glad to fling open his prison door and to let him out into the spacious world for which he was made.

And man is like that caged eagle till God comes into his life. His cage may be large or small as cages go. But if it is as wide as the world and as big as time he batters and bruises his wings against its forbidding bars till Christ sets him free. "Enlarge my coast." This is the conscious or unconscious cry of every human heart. Our self-made prisons smother us and kill our joy. We must go to Him for freedom and enlargement. For it is only as we know Him that we come to live in eternity in time. It is only as we know Him that we come to possess a faith and a hope and a love roomy enough for an immortal soul.

IV

And what was the outcome of this man's prayer? Did it do any good for him to pray? Were any beneficent changes wrought? Was he just the same after as before? Was life still a thing "cribbed, cabined, and confined"? We are not left in the dark as to the answer to these questions. It stands written in the record that God granted his request. God did take his hand in His own. God did keep him. God did enlarge his coast. And what God did yesterday, He will do to-day. What He did for Jabez, He will do for you and me. No life, therefore, need ever be mean and narrow and circumscribed. However small the sphere in which we are called to move, as men count smallness, if we walk with Him, we shall be constantly singing with the Psalmist: "Thou hast set my feet in a large place."

XVI

THE SPOILED DREAM—JEREMIAH

Jeremiah 18: 4

"And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter."

The prophet Jeremiah was commanded to go down to the potter's house that he might receive a message from God. It seems a queer place for one to go to hear God's word. But the prophet was wise enough to do as commanded. "So I went down to the potter's house," he declares, "and behold he wrought a work on the wheel." That is, when the prophet stepped inside this ancient manufacturing establishment three objects at once attracted and held his attention. First, he saw a man at work. A man making something. He saw a potter. Second, he saw that upon which the potter was working, the clay that gradually took the shape of a vessel under his skillful touch. He saw a cup. Third, he saw that with which he worked, the wheel.

Now it was as he looked upon these three objects that he received the divine message. "Cannot I do with you as this potter, saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of

Israel." That is, according to this interpretation, this potter represents God. The cup represents man, it is you and I. The wheel represents all the providences and processes by which God seeks to mold us and fashion us into His own image. This is Jeremiah's philosophy of life. It is the scriptural explanation of man. Man is not here by accident. He is here because a creative and purposeful God has put him here.

God is the potter and man is the cup. Such is the teaching of Jeremiah. Such also, in my judgment, is the teaching of reason and common sense. Omar Khayyam, the Persian poet, looked at the potter and the wheel and the cup and saw a different meaning. He said that fate was the potter. That is, that man is not the product of intelligence but of a blind, stupid fate. The atheistic scientist has no better explanation. For him the potter is an undirected process of evolution. It is natural law. But how queer it would be if I should make a machine that was wiser than myself. And how absurd to believe that the vessel can know while the Maker is entirely ignorant. That the vessel can feel and love while the Maker is as insensitive and loveless as a stone. No, man knows more than any machine he can make. And since man knows, it is reasonable to believe that his Maker knows also, and in an infinitely larger degree.

Now let us look at this potter. The prophet tells us that he is in a sense a picture of God. What is the potter doing?

1. First, he is working. He is giving his attention, his energy, to a certain definite task. So also is the Infinite Potter. Our Lord is not an idler in His universe. "My Father worketh even until now, and I work." Jesus Christ is a ceaseless toiler. It is possible to work and work hard and yet not be a Christian. But no man can be a Christian and be a deliberate and wilful idler. To have fellowship with a working God, I, too, must work.

2. Not only is this potter working, but he is working constructively. He is seeking to make something. The same is also true of God. He is not in His world to wreck it. He is not come to steal nor to kill nor to destroy. There are many human wrecks about us, but they were not made by His hands. He is here as a builder, never as a destroyer. Even the weakest He does not break and cast aside. "A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench." He is the supreme builder. He is the remaker of broken and shattered things.

3. Now what this potter is trying to make is a vessel. What the Heavenly Potter is trying to make is Christ-like men and women. It is upon ourselves that He expends His infinite energies. God has builded the universe. He keeps it in repair. But this is small tax upon His powers. The manufacture of worlds and the flinging of stars into space, these are trifling chores for a God like ours. The task that really taxes Him is the building of manhood and womanhood. It is the remaking of damaged and broken lives. This is the task that means an abiding Gethsemane. This is the work that requires a constant struggle up Calvary. This is the enterprise that is continuously costing the agonies of the Cross. Our

Lord spares Himself no pains as the builder and remaker of human souls.

4. This potter is not only working constructively, but he is working intelligently. He is working according to plan. As the prophet looks at that bit of inert and plastic clay that gradually takes shape in his hands, he sees little of beauty in it. There is also little of usefulness in it. But is there a place where this vessel is a finished product? Is there a place where it is useful? Is there a place where it can hold refreshment for parching? Is there a place where it is a poem? There is. That place is in the mind of the potter. The potter is not working blindly. He saw the vessel that he would make before he ever set himself to the task. He has dreamed a beautiful dream for this bit of clay. He is now seeking to make his dream into reality.

And this is surely even more true of the Infinite Potter. God plans your life and mine. We are not creatures of chance. We are not playthings of fate. We have been sent here. We are here on the King's business. We are here in accordance with the will of God. We are here to carry out the plan of God. He has dreamed a beautiful dream for us. He has a plan for your life and mine that is unique and altogether wonderful. There may be much that is ugly and unsightly about us now, but if we only make it possible for God to realize His purpose for us, then our beauty and worth will be a surprise and a thrill throughout eternity.

5. But while this potter is working constructively and intelligently, he is working with mingled success and failure. He does not realize his purpose in every piece of

clay that he takes in hand. As the prophet watched him at his work he saw a bit of ugly clay gradually assuming a form of usefulness and of loveliness. But suddenly something went wrong. The vessel lost its symmetry. It became to all appearances an incarnate blunder, a tangible mistake, a mere deformity. "The vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter."

And strange as it may seem, the Divine Potter sometimes fails to realize His purpose. God has a plan for every life. It is not always easy to believe this, I know. Nor is it always easy to tell just what that plan is. But we can be sure of this much from the nature of God Himself. He has planned that we should be loving and not loveless. He has planned that we should be clean rather than unclean. He has planned that we should help and not hinder. He has planned that we should serve and not simply be served. Oftentimes we thwart Him. Many a life goes wrong. There are marred souls all about us. But the cause of this tragedy is not that God planned that it should be that way. It is because God found it impossible to realize His purpose.

II

Why does the Divine Potter fail? That this potter with his hands full of clay should fail, does not surprise us. But that the Divine Potter should fail comes to us with a shock. Yet He does fail. There is no shutting our eyes to that fact. Our God is great enough and loving enough to run the risk of failure. He is great enough to bear the heartache and the tragic disappointment of fail-

ure. He has failed in many a human life. He is failing in His efforts to realize His dream in some who are listening to me at this moment. Why, I repeat, does He fail?

He does not fail because of His ignorance. The potter that Jeremiah saw might possibly have misjudged the clay with which he worked. He might have fancied that he saw possibilities in it that were not really there. He might have dreamed a bigger dream for the clay than it was capable of realizing. But not so with our Lord. He knows us just as we are. He is fully acquainted with all our possibilities. He knows just what we are capable of becoming. When He told Simon that he was destined to become a rock of Christlike character, it looked as if He were expecting too much. But He was not. Through the coöperation of Simon His dream came true. And He has made no mistake in your case and mine. He has dreamed a great dream for us. But we may rest assured that that dream is capable of being realized.

Neither does the Potter fail because He becomes careless and indifferent. We get tired, but "The Lord, the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary." We grow careless. Fifty-six fathers and mothers were arrested and fined in Chicago the other day for the neglect of their children. If all had been arrested who were guilty, the number might have run into the thousands. These were so busy amusing themselves that they were allowing their own children to go to the devil. They were so busy trying to have a good time that they were neglecting their God-given opportunity of coöperating with Him in the building of noble lives.

But our Lord never loses interest. He never becomes indifferent. He is always doing His infinite best. He is doing His best with you. He is doing His best with me. Of that I am profoundly convinced. Through the appeal of the Spirit, through His holy word, through sunshine and through shadow, through laughter and tears, through sick beds and open graves, God is doing His infinite best to realize His purpose in your life and in mine. He will spare Himself no pains in order to reach that realization. At infinite cost He is ever seeking the achievement of His purpose.

"None of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark was the night
That the Lord passed thru,
Ere He found His sheep that was lost."

Why, then, I repeat, does the Potter fail? Why did this potter fail? There was something in the clay that resisted him, that made his first dream impossible. And that, I make bold to say, is the only reason that God ever fails with us. I know we feel at times that it is all His fault. But the only reason there is an ugly and marred soul in all the world is just because that soul is resisting the Potter. "The Lord said my Spirit shall not always strive with man." There would be no strife at all but for one tragic fact: man resists God. For there is this difference between man and the clay. The clay has no will, man has. We can say "no" to God. We can shake our puny fists in His face and defy Him. We can through our obstinacy and stubbornness spoil one by one the fine purposes and plans that He makes for us.

Now there can be but one outcome of our resisting God. We become marred. "The vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter." What a pity. Intended for a poem, it became a monstrosity. What a fine dream God had for Saul! But he was afraid of the will of God. Therefore, he resisted, held back, took his life out of God's hands, played the fool, and ended a pathetic ruin. How beautiful was Christ's dream for Judas! But Judas felt that he could do better for himself, flung away from Him and ended in the potters' field. To resist God is always to rob ourselves. No man ever turned from Him, even for an hour, that he did not cheat himself of something of the fullness of beauty, usefulness and joy that God purposed for him. If you resist God, your sin may hurt many. It will certainly hurt you.

III

What does Jeremiah's potter do with the marred vessel? There it is, ugly, useless, worthless. What would you expect him to do with it? The reasonable thing for him to do is to throw it away, get a new supply of clay, and start again. That is what the prophet expected him to do. But to his amazement he did not do it. He took the marred and ugly thing and set himself immediately to the task of making it again. "And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it."

And what does God do when we resist him? What does he do when we disappoint Him, when we defy Him

and break His heart? He does not get impatient with us and throw us away. When we realize what blunderers we are, we often wonder that He does not give us up. We make good resolutions, but soon forget them. We strike one timid blow in defense of right, then lose our courage and take to our heels. We glance upward in a moment of inspiration, but soon take our stand again beside the man with the muck rake and once more fix our gaze upon the sticks and straw of the barnyard. Yet He never loses heart, for no failure can daunt Him. No disappointment can embitter Him. When we through our sin and folly wreck ourselves, He sets right in to make us again.

What a gospel for a world like ours! What a gospel for men and women like ourselves! This has been called the gospel of the Second Chance. It is far more. It is the gospel of the third chance and of the fourth chance and of the millionth chance. He has commanded us to forgive until seventy times seven. Certainly He will not do less Himself. Always he stands ready to make us again. Here and now He confronts every marred soul with this question, "Wilt thou be made whole?" If you say "yes" to Him He will surely remake you. This does not mean, of course, that He will make you according to His original plan. "He made it again another vessel." When the potter saw that he could not realize his first fine dream, he tried the second best. And remember this; not even God can do as much with the fragment of a life as He can do with a whole life. He will remake you if you come to Him after three score and ten, and

beyond. But He can make you into something finer if you come to Him in life's green spring.

But suppose you keep resisting Him. Suppose the potter sees his vessel spoiled the third and the fourth and the fifth time. He keeps patiently at his task. But this is happening all the while. The clay is gradually hardening. It is becoming less and less plastic. The same is true with ourselves. Our gospel is the savor of life unto life or of death unto death. If you step outside the potter's house you find yourself in the potter's field. At once you feel the crunch of broken earthenware under your feet. How came it there? Did the potter make a vessel in order to break it? No. This broken earthenware is the clay that hardened in the hands of the potter so that it defeated his purpose and there was nothing left to do with it but to throw it away. And Jesus said there was a type of human soul that was good for nothing but to be cast out.

IV

How can we avoid such tragedy? In only one way. We must put ourselves in His hands. We must surrender to Him. If we give ourselves to Him, He will take us. If we give ourselves to Him He will remake us. If we give ourselves to Him we shall find the secret of life's highest blessedness. For whoever lives within the circle of the divine will is God's care-free, happy child regardless of the outward circumstances under which that life may be lived. Put yourself in His hands and you will be able to prove by your own experience "what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

"Have thine own way, Lord. Have Thine own way,
Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.
Mould me and make me after Thy will,
While I am waiting, yielded and still.

"Have Thine own way, Lord. Have Thine own way,
Hold o'er my being absolute sway.
Fill with Thy Spirit till all shall see
Christ only, always, living in me."

THE END

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